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SERMONS ADDRESSED TO INDIVIDUALS

SERMONS ADDRESSED TO INDIVIDUALS

BY
REGINALD J. CAMPBELL
MINISTER OF THE CITY TEMPLE
LONDON

NEW YORK
A. C. ARMSTRONG & SON
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THE AUTHOR'S PREFACE

It is often asserted that sermons as a rule make very poor reading. Somehow they seem to lose their human interest when they pass into the printed page and the personality of the preacher is withdrawn. Such, of course, is not always the case, as the sermons of Spurgeon, Phillips Brooks, and Robertson of Brighton clearly testify; but it must be admitted that these are the exception, not the rule. Most sermonic literature is dry reading, or if it be the reported verbatim utterance of the preacher—and this is not literature—the colloquialisms and direct style of address have a tendency to become irritating to the reader. This tendency is especially noticeable if reported sermons are issued in permanent form.

With these considerations in view something in the nature of an experiment is being attempted in the issue of the present volume. The sermons included herein are not literature, they are extempore speech; they are face to face teaching and exhortation addressed to an audience which, at the time, and to the preacher, consisted as it were of but one individual. They are human documents called forth by living human experiences.

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Every one of these sermons came into existence because some one asked for it or some life story suggested it. It is the preacher's conviction that in this way the Holy Spirit breathed upon the word. Every sermon bore fruit in blessing received and acknowledged. They are now sent forth upon a further mission, and in the hope that some who read them may be helped thereby. A short account of the origin of each is prefixed to every text. By this method, perhaps, readers who might otherwise fail to grasp their true significance may enter in some degree the mental atmosphere breathed by the congregation which heard them. In no other respect have they been altered. They are mere transcripts of the oral delivery, and, as such, must be their own justification.

That they may be used again to our Saviour's greater glory is the author's prayer.

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CONTENTS

PAGE

I

QUO VADIS? 1

II

THE DEATH-SONG OF JESUS 21

III

THE WINDOWS OPEN TOWARDS JERUSALEM . . . 35

IV

THE MISUSE OF DIVINE POWER 49

V

A FORFEITED GIFT 71

VI

THE WAY THROUGH THE FLOOD 87

VII

SOME GREAT THING 105

VIII

ETERNAL PUNISHMENT AND ETERNAL LIFE . . 127

IX

THE LAW OF RETRIBUTION 149

PAGE

X

THE HIGHEST SELF-OFFERING 169

XI

THIRSTING FOR THE WATER OF LIFE . . . 189

XII

BURNING—UNCONSUMED 205

XIII

SIN'S SELF-DISCOVERY 225

XIV

A CAKE OF BARLEY BREAD 241

XV

A SINFUL GOD 257

XVI

THE AGNOSTICISM OF JESUS 275

XVII

ONENESS WITH GOD 295

XVIII

INWARD TRUTH 313

QUO VADIS?

It is my custom to remain at the City Temple on Thursday afternoons in order to see and converse with such callers as may wish for a private interview. This is almost the only way in which pastoral work is possible to me, unless my correspondence column in the *British Weekly* can be accounted pastoral work. The geographical situation of the church is such, and the distances from which members come lie so widely apart, that anything like ordinary pastoral visitation is out of the question. But there are some compensations in this fact. One of them undoubtedly is that in the face to face and heart to heart conversations in the vestry, minister and caller get to understand each other without much waste of time. Few will take the trouble to come unless they have some serious purpose in doing so: there are no preliminaries to be got over; no apologies for introducing religious matters; no false assumptions about the conventionalities of the occasion; we can go at once to the point.

Through this method I have learned much. So far as one is able to judge, God has blessed it more obviously than the pulpit work out of which it grew. This may not be so in reality, but the results are more easily estimated, and the personal relations established are of a more sacred character.

The following sermon was preached on a Thursday morning in 1903; it grew out of some meditation on certain tendencies of the time and the contradictory advice given as to the proper way to deal with them. Dr Josiah Strong's work was beginning to be discussed. Dr Watson and others were reiterating with emphasis that the Church must adjust herself to a new situation and new problems. Mr Hall Caine had been arousing the enthusiasm of an audience of social workers by his criticism of the supineness of organised christianity. Not more than usual, perhaps, were such speeches being made, but more of them had come my way. I was of opinion then, as I am now, that vague charges

against the churches would do but little to solve the great problem of the social needs of the hour. Outsiders taunt the churches with their failure, and the churches themselves are in the mood to acknowledge it. Where then is the mischief? Preachers and Christian workers are quite ready to be shown what to do if anyone with clear vision can point out the way. My own view is that this new susceptibility which the churches are exhibiting towards a longing for a better and a healthier religious life marks the beginning of a better day. In fact it is the Word of the Lord for us at this moment, but our answer to His call must be an individual one. We are enquiring what the Lord means us to do for this generation. Are we prepared individually to do the one thing, whatever it may be, which He reveals to us as the answer to our prayer?

I remember saying this to two gentlemen who repeated in my hearing, and that of the deacons, on the previous Sunday, some of the criticisms of the churches hinted at above. They had been struck with the possibilities of the City Temple if the congregation were to act together as one great organised force. "What are you doing yourselves?" I replied. "Christ never waits for organisations."

The situation here described was paralleled in the Upper Room, and in the profound moral significance of our Lord's repetition of the disciples' question, "Whither goest Thou?"

I

"Now I go My way to Him that sent Me, and none of you asketh Me, Whither goest Thou?"—JOHN xvi. 5.

THESE strange words fell from the lips of our Master almost as a kind of interruption or aside in the course of His valedictory address in the upper room; yet they are full of luminous suggestion. Their true relevance is only seen when we call to mind the circumstances under which they were spoken. In order to make clear what those circumstances were, I will read three extracts from this wonderful part of the New Testament, St John's Gospel. The question, "Whither goest thou?" was put to our Lord at least twice before He uttered the words which form our text. On the first occasion, the question came from the lips of Simon Peter: "Lord, whither goest Thou?" (John xii. 36). On the second occasion, the question was put to him inferentially by Thomas the Doubter; the remonstrance of the Apostle was couched in this phrase: "Lord, we know not whither Thou goest; and how can we know the way?" (John xiv. 5). How, then, could our Master, after these two interrogations, say to the same group of men, and on the same occasion, "None of you asketh Me, Whither goest Thou?" They had asked Him twice, and on neither occasion had He satisfied their

questioning. I take it that the explanation is this. Our Lord had something of solemn import to say to the disciples in the upper room, and they were not prepared to hear it—perhaps not so much prepared as He had a right to expect. In that tender ejaculation, "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now," I catch a tone of rebuke. They were not in the mood to listen, their thoughts were earth-bound, and even their love of their Master robbed them at this moment of the true spiritual perspective which He wished them to attain unto. For our Lord's eye was fixed upon the glory that was to be; for the joy that was set before Him He already in anticipation had endured the Cross and despised the shame, and was set down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Our Lord was looking past Gethsemane, beyond Pilate's hall, past Calvary's hill, past even the tomb and the Resurrection morning. He was looking to the glory land and to that wider ministry which He is exercising in our midst to-day. "I go My way unto Him that sent Me, and it is expedient for you that I go away." But is it wonderful that the Apostles could not share in this magnificent vision that the Master was taking at this moment? He was compelled to pause, for their questionings were missing the mark every time that they were made. In the first instance He announced His approaching departure, but Peter, confused at the thought of the ministry which was now, as he thought, reach-

ing its zenith of success from an earthly point of view, interposes the question, "Now, Master, where are You going? Is it to Samaria? Is it to Rome? Are You going to repeat there the triumphs of the Galilean ministry? Shall we see a crowd welcoming the Jewish Messiah, even into the imperial city, with hosannas, just as to-day You have been welcomed into Jerusalem? Whither goest thou, Master? Let us go and share in the success and the glory too." This was not altogether a selfish proposition, either, for Peter really did love his Master, but the full significance of his Master's work he had yet to learn.

The gloomier doubter, when, little by little, our Lord returned to the solemnity of the real farewell that He was about to speak, voices the puzzled feeling of the disciples in the expostulation: "Lord, we know not whither thou goest; we should be glad to go with you, but we do not know the way." How much clearer would it become—perhaps not much—to his puzzled intellect, when the Master replied: "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No man cometh unto the Father but by Me. I go My way unto Him that sent Me?" This stopped their questioning; they did not wish to hear the word of farewell, and it gradually became clear to them that the Master was really going. This was the end of the earthly ministry; no more teaching upon the hillsides of Galilee, no more crowds—thousands strong—pressing upon Him to hear His words; no more brief

authority for these disciples; and, above all, what was to become of the Messianic kingdom in which they had expected to play so august a part? It was all coming to an end. Hence the questioning stopped, too. This good-bye is not temporary, it is final; there is not a new ministry to be commenced in Samaria or in Rome; Jesus is withdrawing Himself from the gaze of men. If there is to be a ministry it is no longer to be a visible ministry; and all of a sudden it came to these simple Galileans that the world would be a blank to them without Christ; they ceased questioning, for sorrow had filled their hearts. Now, you see—shall I call it?—the psychology of the situation. The Master, with His tender smile, looked upon the men who had eagerly offered themselves a few minutes before, questioning where He was going, that they might accompany Him. "Lord, why cannot I follow Thee now? I will lay down my life for Thy sake." The answer, in effect, was, "You are not ready; before the cock crow thou shalt thrice deny that thou knewest Me." When it came to the real good-bye, and they felt that the Jesus they had known and loved and followed was to be removed from them, is it any wonder that their self-offering and their affectionate questioning came to an end? "Why don't you go on with your questioning? Twice you have asked Me whither I am going; now when I make it clear that I go My way unto Him that sent Me, the questioning has stopped;

none of you asketh Me, Whither goest Thou? And yet this, if you could only see it, is the best news that I have spoken to you this night. It is expedient for you that I go away. The ministry has not come to an end; it is only beginning. The Christ is to reign: have you faith enough to come with Me through the darkness? There is a glory dawning; by-and-bye the Comforter is coming; the Christ shall be lifted up, and all men shall be drawn unto Him. And ye are My witnesses; for ye have been with Me from the beginning." If these simple men had only known it, now was their opportunity. Their questionings were missing the mark, they had not realised what the Master said, and He was telling them in this moment of farewell of a coming nearness, transcending anything ever yet known of their earthly Master in His Galilean days.

I want to apply the words very intimately and specially to your case and mine. Spoken nineteen hundred years ago, they have as fresh a significance to-day as when Peter and Thomas first heard them. He who spake them is gone; there is no Jesus here; taken by wicked hands and crucified and slain, He no longer lives to walk and work amongst men. Those who heard Him have gone; the body of St Peter has long mouldered into dust. Who can say what has become of Thomas the Doubter? The men who played the hero for Christ in the first ages of the Church, those who

saw Him in the flesh and heard these precious sayings fall from His lips, have all passed to their reward, and now, if these words have any significance at all, it is not for them, it is for you and for me. Though the Christ is gone, the spirit of the Christ remains. I do not wish you to understand that word in any vague or unreal sense. Some of the men to whom I speak have a very feeble faith in my Lord, and I would like to take you with me every step that I go when I repeat His words. How much could you say with assurance about Jesus Christ? Where is He, who is He? About the latter of those two questions we have wasted a great deal of time. I will ask you to follow me in a series of hypotheses. Where is the Christ? Grant me two things, and I will tell you. First, I want you to say, with Matthew Arnold, "There is an Eternal, not ourselves, which makes for righteousness." Now, my brethren of the City offices, the strenuous life of this vast Metropolis, representative as you are of the typical life of England, can you say that? You are sure from the bottom of your heart that there is, though you cannot prove it, an Eternal, not ourselves, which makes for righteousness. You would say that much? Take another step, which is but the same proposition, and affirm with the Victorian poet,

> "To feel, although no tongue can prove,
> That every cloud that spreads above,
> And veileth love, itself is love."

Say this also. Our life has a significance far beyond our present apprehension of it, and every life has value for God. We have an immortal destiny.

> "Life is real, life is earnest,
> And the grave is not its goal,
> 'Dust thou art, to dust returnest,'
> Was not spoken of the soul."

You may think very little about the world's to-morrow, and you may be far more concerned about your own to-day than you may be about any after death, but while you affirm with me those two things—there is a Righteousness enthroned somewhere, and there is a better day for you and me—if you can only say that much, you have already come to close quarters with the Christ. It is a marvellous thing that every time a man proceeds to ask any question concerning the fundamentals of his own being and destiny he is at grips with Jesus. It is impossible that it should be otherwise. We have identified—or if you won't pass that word, let us say associated—Jesus with the Eternal that makes for righteousness, and if there is a deathless life for any, then Jesus, whoever He may be, is alive somewhere. Now, supposing it is Jesus the Carpenter, and only He, who lives somewhere, it is a question of the gravest import for you and me what that Christ is thinking about this world, and how much He can do to affect our destiny. Only suppose that He happens to be the director of that destiny, can you think of any question so important,

so urgent, as this, Where is the Christ leading His own? Whither goest Thou, my Lord?

I have brought into the pulpit with me a book, written on a subject that does not concern us for a moment; it is not a religious book, unless, perhaps, very indirectly, but a book on a scientific subject, and I take from it this sentence:

> "There is nothing to hinder the reverent faith that, though we be all children of the Most Highest, He came nearer than we, by some space to us immeasurable, to that which is infinitely far."

I am not going to ask any man here for any more theology than that "He stands nearer, by some space to us immeasurable, to that which is infinitely far." Now suppose—I am going on with my hypotheses—suppose, instead of Jesus, I was talking about your father or mother or child who had passed into the unseen and to the Eternal that makes for righteousness; if your father is really there, if the grave does not hold him, if your mother's lips have not been silenced for evermore, your father is thinking and your mother is praying about you. You cannot imagine them to be changed; the child has not forgotten the love that you once gave, and the parents can never forget the solicitude they once showed for you who are bone of their bone, flesh of their flesh. Now suppose—only suppose—that the Christ who once taught in Galilee, the Christ who gathered this little circle of men round Him in that upper room, even if He be only Jesus

the Carpenter, has gone into the unseen with the same spirit that He showed in the days of old, with the same deathless love, with the same yearning solicitude to save men; does it matter, or does it not, what this Man, whose name is lifted above all the names that are in the earth, is thinking and doing about this world? I cannot stop here; something impels me to take the last step, for faith urges me to say: He is thinking and He is doing. His is the name above every name, that to which every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess Christ Jesus as Lord. He is the Master of our fate, the Lord of life and death. Now what is Jesus doing? To the question that stands before all other questions, "Lord, whither leadest Thou?" the signs of the times ought to afford us the answer. It is never easy for a man to estimate the conditions of his own day; we are too near to the facts. For instance, I think it is most likely that Mr Chamberlain will loom larger in the estimate of posterity, possibly, than in that of this day and generation. We did not know how great Mr Gladstone was until we came to think of him as a figure in history; now we are getting a right perspective as we look back. But the perspective is not easy to get when we stand in the midst of big events. It is not easy to estimate, then, the signs of the times, but perhaps a good way of trying to discover the prevailing mood of our own time is to look back a little while and see how it compares with that which is past.

In the middle of the last century England was in a temper somewhat different from the temper which she exhibits to-day. In 1846 the Corn Laws had just been abolished, and from that moment a new era of hopefulness and prosperity dawned for our historic nation. Not this country only, but other countries, shared in the buoyancy of spirit which came like the dawning of the morning to a weary world. France took a step forward in the inauguration of a new Constitution; nationalities in Europe were struggling into political liberty; young Italy was looking to this country as an example; and we —what were we doing? Albert the Good was just inaugurating that first experiment in international friendly competition and goodwill—the Great Exhibition of 1851. The other day a man, who was then in early manhood, told me that, speaking for his contemporaries, he could say men were filled with hopefulness; they felt the golden age was just at hand. Moreover, there was a great confidence in the future of our own country; men, praying for an era of peace, thought of England as being the leader and the guide of the civilisation of the world. A good spirit was abroad, a hopeful spirit, one of alertness, buoyancy, confidence. What became of it? In 1854 we had the Crimean War —a blunder; worse than a blunder, a crime, as we have now discovered; in 1857 we had the Indian Mutiny; in 1870 the Franco-German War, and in 1878 the Russo-Turkish War, with its long legacy of

atrocities. All our hopes have been damped. The education of the people has not wrought the results that were expected. The buoyancy and confidence that existed in this country in 1848 appear to have crossed the ocean, and are now the characteristic of our cousins in America. A certain misgiving, apparently, is in the minds of some of the best men to-day, that perhaps we are witnessing the beginnings of national decay. In religion, what do we see? The Rev. Frank Ballard states it as his opinion that the vast mass of the workers amongst our fellow-countrymen are being increasingly alienated from the Church. He says it is not definite hostility so much as indifference and contempt which they show to us and to our methods. If we have lost the note of confidence and hopefulness, that verve, that glamour of enthusiasm which has again and again in the history of the world swept over the people that were making history, we must get it back. For, be assured no nation can long stand which ceases to believe in her mission. England has had something to do for God—may it be that the churches are asking the wrong questions of their Master to-day, and failing to read Him in the signs of the times? Christ has to do, not now and then, but all the time, with the making of history for He is the Master of the destiny of nations as of individuals, and He rides on the whirlwind and directs the storm. If we can read the signs of the times aright, we hear our Master's call from out the

midst of the conditions of our own day, "This do and thou shalt live."

What shall we do? There are many amongst us anticipating an evangelical revival, a great stirring of the religion which is ineradicably present in the hearts of men in all ages. What form will this revival take? On one hand, we hear one thing, and on another, another. Sometimes the Church is blamed for her slackness in the preaching of the old evangel; sometimes she is blamed in that she has not succeeded in getting the ear of the masses as her Master did by adapting her message to their needs. An article was put into my hands only five minutes before I came into the pulpit, curiously enough, written upon the very theme upon which I am addressing you—What form the next revival will take. There will be one, of that you may be perfectly sure, Church or no Church. Peter and Thomas in this chapter are asking the right question, it may be, "Lord, whither goest Thou?" and were almost ready with the answer: "To Samaria or to Rome—to this shibboleth, or to that; Lord, we are prepared to accompany you, and to repeat them as we have always done." And the Master's answer may be coming now as it came to them, "Because I have said these things, sorrow has filled your heart." Before I read the article I am about to quote, let me take you back to John xvi., and see why it was that sorrow had filled their hearts—partly because the Master was going, but

partly because the glory was going with Him. Peter had just been sharing in the hosannas; he wanted more, and this is what he received:—"The time shall come when he that killeth you will think that he is doing a service unto God. These things have I told you, that when the time shall come you may remember that I told you of them. But because I have said these things"—not only that He was going, but that something else was coming, a strenuous time, a time of trial—sorrow had filled their hearts. Peter was ready for the Mount of Transfiguration, ready for the hosannas and the palm-branches, but he was not yet ready for the Cross. Yet the time did come when Peter was ready to testify, suffer, and die, for his Lord.

Now, supposing Peter were here to-day to put the question to the Master, "Lord whither goest Thou?"—for where He is I must go; help me to fulfill the destiny which Christ has declared to the generation in which I was born. The answer is this. "There will be a revival," says Dr Watson, better known as Ian Maclaren.

"When God is pleased to send His new Prophet, one expects that he will preach the Gospel of social deliverance; that the white female slaves who sew from morning till night, and half through the night, and hardly get the wherewithal to keep soul and body together, should be delivered from their bondage, that every labourer who is willing and temperate should have his living wage wherewith to keep himself and his family, that every citizen of England, however humble, should have his own little home wherein to live in peace and comfort, that the countryman

should not be evicted from the land to make room for wild animals and rich men's sport, that the owners of insanitary property should be punished and not compensated, that temptations should not be placed at every street corner in the way of the poor and miserable, that every man should have free access to education, to the country, to health and just enjoyment, and that the burden of weariness and sickness and tyranny should be lifted from the shoulders of them who labour and are heavy laden. From this preaching, when it comes with power, two classes will receive a blessing. . . . When Christianity has at a great cost given a home to the humblest of the people, she will find a welcome home in the people's heart."

All this means some cost to the individual. It is easy for any man to put his finger on the difficulty to-day, and to say how others should solve it; but the call comes to us each by each and one by one. "Simon, Son of Jonas," said the Master, "lovest thou Me more than these? Tend my sheep, feed my lambs." No fear of the dying down of moral enthusiasm; the Christ is leading, and the spirit of Christ is inspiring every heroic service for the King. You who would serve the Master, serve the Master's own. We call for the union of all who love in the cause of all who suffer. Don't let us misplace our question, "Lord whither goest Thou?" The signs of the times afford the answer. We cannot but follow where Jesus has led. There is a Roman Catholic legend as to the martyrdom of the Apostle Peter, which runs thus: St Peter was urged by his fellow-Christians in Rome, when martyrdom was imminent, to flee the city and take refuge from the last dread ordeal. Finally he succumbed to the appeal, and

was about to flee from the headsman's axe, when he fell asleep, and dreamed that he had escaped the city. Outside, in the Appian Way, he met his Master's form coming towards the Rome he had just left, and Peter uttered the words of his question in the upper room, "Lord, whither goest Thou?" The answer of the Master was, "I go to Rome to be crucified a second time." Peter bowed his head before the Master, and said, "Lord, be it far from Thee. I shall go." He turned back. When he woke from his dream he no longer desired to escape martyrdom; he was crucified for Christ. Beloved, we are called to be crucified with Christ. There is no escape. In the practical things of this world, doing the right, the loving, the kind, and the true, will always cost. It has to be faced, and it must be done, if we would follow where He leads. There is a familiar picture called the Via Dolorosa; the central figure is the Christ leading a suffering, groaning, agonised multitude. The Cross is upon His shoulder, and in the darkness of that sombre avenue men and women are toilsomely, painfully creeping behind Him along the Via Dolorosa to a better place on the further side of the forbidding crags. False to the facts! He went forth bearing His Cross, standing strong upon His feet. We who follow behind Him to the strenuous and the heroic life have no need to lie down and toilsomely to creep behind the Master. The cure for the pusillanimity of the weak, the coward shrinking from high things,

the remedy for dying-down enthusiasms, is to preach Christ's salvation, Christ's consolation, Christ the Master, the near, the present, the strong Friend. He is leading, He is thinking, He is caring. He has never ceased to care. And as He cares His call comes. Who amongst us is ready to obey?

THE DEATH-SONG OF JESUS

THE following sermon had a very simple origin. From time to time members of my congregation send requests for prayer for themselves or their friends. Sometimes these requests are accompanied by particulars intended for the minister's eye alone. A greater number of these than usual had been received; stories of trouble, perplexity and danger. One such note contained a postscript, the exact words of which I cannot remember, but concluding with the phrase, "Songs of despair." Instantly there came to the preacher's mind the hymn that Jesus sang before Calvary—no song of despair.

II

"And when they had sung an hymn, they went out."—Mark xiv. 26.

This text opens before us an endless vista of love and beauty. "And when they had sung an hymn, they went out." Think of all that was to follow, and remember that Jesus knew it. This hymn, whatever it was, was therefore the death-song of Jesus. And what was it? There is surprisingly little curiosity on the subject. I do not recollect that I have ever heard the question asked, What was the hymn that Jesus sang on the night of His betrayal?

It may be that many here have never thought about it at all. And yet we every one of us remember with a certain sweet sadness the songs of our beloved dead, and when they sang them.

> "Jesu, Lover of my soul,
> Let me to Thy bosom fly."

While I repeat the line, some person present says to himself, "Those were the last words my father ever uttered."

> "To Him the first fond prayers are said
> Our lips of childhood frame;
> The last low whispers of our dead
> Are burdened with His name."

"Rock of Ages cleft for me." While I repeat the familiar line that we shall be singing in most of our places of worship within the next few days, someone present will be thinking, "That was my mother's favourite hymn." We remember these associations with the name of Jesus, and we graft them upon our memory of the holy dead. Is it not, then, somewhat surprising that we never ask what hymn it was that He Himself sang in the hour and article of death? There is good reason to believe that it was Psalm cxviii. It was especially appropriate to the feast which Jesus observed with His disciples, and it contains the very sentence with which the crowds greeted Him on that morning or the day before in the streets of Jerusalem, "Hosanna! Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord." It was being sung by more than the little group of disciples in the upper room, but it was far more appropriate than anyone but Jesus knew, for He sang it alone. The steps of His betrayer were even at that moment audible as they passed into the night. The grand, lonely soul of Jesus, august Son of God, singing in the moment of His betrayal; His murderers are ready with their swords and staves, the fires are lit in the hall of Caiaphas; the very cross is fashioned and Calvary's horror is waiting. It was all arranged; there was no justice about the matter; the verdict was foreordained by those who had schemed to murder Him, and in this terrible moment this is what He sings:—

"I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord. . . . This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. . . . God is the Lord, who hath shewed us light; bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar. Thou art my God, and I will praise Thee: Thou art my God, I will exalt Thee. O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever."

This was the song that Jesus sang.

The death-song of Jesus is, you see, a song of triumph uttered before the agony came. He knew absolutely that the Father would not fail Him, that evil could not prevail, and that the sacrifice would be a great victory. But mark this: He could not see beyond Calvary. He knew, but He could not see. Faith never can do otherwise than that; it knows, but it cannot see. He could see the whole way right up to Calvary; He knew what He was going to do, and that it must be done alone, and as Peter and John were singing on either side of Him, "Bind the sacrifice with cords," he knew that they were going to run away; the moment they stopped singing He told them about that, as we read in the context; and He knew that He would have to fling His strong arm around them, and beg their lives from his own murderers. He knew it; He knew about the midnight trial, and the travesty of justice; He knew the face of the perplexed Roman governor on the throne when He, the King, stood before him, as an accused criminal. He saw the sea of murderous faces round the cross, and He already felt in anticipation the terrible shame of it all. Yet He could

not see beyond Calvary. He only knew, "Thou wilt not leave his soul in the grave, neither wilt Thou suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption"—every detail up to Calvary, and not a moment beyond it.

Someone will say, Could Jesus have done less? Surely He could see the end from the beginning. He foresaw the rending of the tomb. He knew how much hung upon His faithfulness, and upon the way He fought His conflict through. In a word, the whole destiny of humanity rested upon what Jesus would do. Could He have done less than He did? I answer, No, He could not. But that does not lessen my obligation to Him, nor the fitness of its expression. Jesus could not have done less just because He was Jesus, and because He was so noble and pure, and because His purpose had to be accomplished to the last detail. So He did not shrink from the Cross. He could not have done less, nor does this consideration diminish the grandeur of His demeanour in the slightest degree.

Two great mysteries stand out here. First, the mystery of His agony. As a Roman Catholic theologian has put it, the agony in the garden and the dereliction on Calvary present to the gaze an ocean of sorrow on the shores of which we may stand and look down upon the waveless surface, but the depths below no created intelligence can fathom. Never speak lightly of the agony of Christ, for you do not know what it was, nor how terrible, nor how

overwhelming even to the Divine Son of God. The second mystery is the mystery of His deliverance. He saw through the first mystery, but not the second. He saw the agony as we never can see it, but He did not see beyond. We see the second, but not the first. We never can look on Calvary except over the empty tomb. We see on this side of the Cross; Christ looked on the other. Think, then, of the grandeur and the magnificence of that august Figure, standing pathetic and lonely in the upper room, singing, "Bind the sacrifice with cords, bind it to the horns of the altar . . . O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy endureth forever."

The present Bishop of Worcester somewhere says, there was nothing endured by Christ which we may not also be called upon to suffer in our degree. I ask you to weigh that sentence. In fellowship with Christ we may be capable of the same grandeur of achievement in our degree; and herein consists the principal value of my beautiful text, "And when they had sung an hymn, they went out." Do you observe the plural number? There were twelve men singing, but only One of them sang the song as it should be sung. The eleven did not know much about it. They protested their loyalty, their faithfulness, their fervour of devotion, but by-and-bye they forsook Him and fled. But that was not the end, thank God. Peter and John and the rest had their chance again, and

the time came round when they sang the death-song of Jesus as they had not sung it before, and this was the ring of it: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith, I am now ready to be offered." These terror-stricken Galileans who fled from Gethsemane ere long became heroes for the Christ, and sang the death-song of Jesus in the very face of tyranny and shame. The things that had terrified them before were mere shadows compared with this. But something had changed them: was it not that they had learned to sing the death-song of Jesus with His own accent, knowing it was but the beginning and not the end?

Looking into the face of this congregation this morning, I am conscious of a deep respect for the souls that look back at me out of your eyes. What tragedies are here; what secret agonies; what shame; what betrayal; what desertion; what midnight trial; what Calvary, I know not, but I would ask you a question in the spirit of my text: What kind of song is your heart singing? Can it sing at all? Can you see God anywhere? Or is your vision bounded by the cross? I mean the cross on which your hopes have been crucified. There are some grand things here, if I could only get at them. And, by the way, I never remember preaching a sermon here, and adducing one single illustration from the facts of human life as I know it, without someone who was here either coming or writing to

me afterwards and saying, "That was my life you were describing." Well, I once heard of, but never knew, a young father who fought a battle with fate on this wise. He was smitten with a deadly disease; he knew it, and was told that his only chance of life was that he should suffer someone to minister to him, and for the rest of his days—short days, too—he should take things quietly and rest and wait for death. "Let others suffer, and let others strive; be still," said the doctor, "that is your only chance of life." But he had two little babes, so he took another course. He might have turned bitter, and cursed and railed against fate, and, with it, God. Or he might have pitied himself and taken the easier course, and called upon others to provide for these his loved ones. But he did not; he went out as if nothing had happened, back to his work with double intensity. He could not leave his children to the mercy of the world. It is not that the world is so very unkind, but it forgets. He determined they should have their chance when he himself was gone. He uttered no complaint; he never presented to them any story of his own heroism. He just went on with brave heart and cheerful face. For years that man sang the death-song of Christ, and no martyr going to the stake ever sang it better.

I have also heard of, but never knew, a young mother, whose means of livelihood was her gift of song, and once when her only child was lying ill at

home she had to sing for bread before a gaping crowd, and refuse an encore that she might escape from the footlights and get back to that suffering bedside. When she got there it was only to hear that there was no hope. This was the last request of her dying child—"Mother, sing to me!" Can you think of anything more terrible than that midnight agony? In the very presence of the shadow of death the brave little woman gathers her baby to her breaking heart and paces that death-room singing:—

> "I think when I read that sweet story of old
> When Jesus was here among men,
> How He called little children like lambs to His fold,
> I should like to have been with Him then."

The child was going home, the mother was to live, but it was she and not the child that sang the death-song of Jesus, and sang it well for love's sake.

Compare these two cases, and you can find experiences in this congregation sufficiently like them to make it worth my while to paint the picture. Of one such I have heard this very week. A mother writes to me, as many people do about the things I teach and the things I do not teach, and complains that I declare an impossible God, an imaginary God, a God, she says, for comfortable Christians. Here let me in an aside warn anyone from ever seeking to interpret another person's life and labelling it either comfortable or stern. You never can change places with anyone, and you never can penetrate to

the springs of another man's being: only God can do that. But this, in effect, is what she says. I do not give you the very words. My heart filled up with pity when I read them: "Knowing the struggle I have had to keep the wolf from the door, and how I prayed my prayers in vain, I have come to the conclusion there may be a God, but He is no God of love, He is a God whose words are pain. If there be such a God, I loathe Him with my whole soul. My little girl of six has learnt to blaspheme His name, and I never rebuke her, rather, I am glad." Poor bitter-hearted woman! Do you know, I think I can read in a declaration of that kind that she is not so far from God as she seems. If a man has intensity enough to protest against the heavenly Father, the one feeling can be pretty quickly translated into the other, and the protest become praise. But oh what a mistake she is making now! She knows little or nothing of the fellowship of the Cross. Has she never heard anything of the meaning of Gethsemane and Calvary, or the death-song of Jesus? She has refused to sing it, and what is worse, she has stifled the song of an angel in the heart of her little child. How near together lie success and failure in the great moral crisis of life! We say of that young father whom I have just described, "Could he have done less?" Of course he could not; he would have been false to his trusteeship if he had. He did exactly what God meant him to do; no more than Jesus, could he

have done less in the shadow of Calvary. He sang the death-song, sang it like a martyr, sang it like a saint, and it may be that you and I, sooner rather than late, will have our death-song to sing, and to go on living.

I speak this morning to any man or any woman who is fronting some terrible thing, who, like Christ in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, goes forward with a face towards the gleam of light at the end, with the demons whispering gibes in your ear. Your prayer for strong deliverance is heard; you can meet your fate—shall we call it fate?—your lot, with bitterness, or you can meet it with the spirit of defiance, which is the spirit of the devil all the same. There is another way: meet it in the spirit of the Christ; rise high to the opportunity. "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord . . . bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar"—and oh—can you say it?—"give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever." The Lord would not think much of humanity if He gave it only the toys in the nursery. He gives us something grander than that; it is the fellowship of the Cross. We have nothing to do with our own redemption; we have much to do with filling up the measure that is behind. Christ fought a battle for us, let us fight our battle with Him.

I would say, then, to any man or woman of broken mutilated life, Lift up your heart and listen, listen

to the death-song of Jesus, which is sung by the heavenly choir, the choir of those who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. When the organist was playing that lovely voluntary this morning, which came with such a sweet and quieting devotional influence upon your hearts and mine, I thought of something which I now suggest to you. If you were to place in this pulpit a violin or harp tuned to the pitch of the organ above, and leave it alone, not touching it, and that voluntary was played again, and you bent your ear near to the stringed instrument, seemingly so silent, you would hear every note of it coming from strings that are swept by the hand of no human player. My brethren, you are like the harp strung by the hand of God. Keep atune with heaven, and you shall sing such a song as you will never otherwise sing in this world. It is no human hand that sweeps the strings, only the Hand that tuned them; and your melody already joins with that of the great choir above.

As my closing application of this beautiful message of God, "When they had sung an hymn, they went out," let me quote some lines by the Rev. V. J. Charlesworth:

"When friends are few or far away,
Sing on, dear heart, sing on!
They rise to sing who kneel to pray,
Sing on, dear heart, sing on!
The songs of earth to heav'n ascend,

And with adoring anthems blend,
Whose ringing echoes ne'er shall end;
Sing on, dear heart, sing on!"

Yes, even so, sing on, for even now your melody is blending with the strains of the multitude that no man can number around the throne of God.

THE WINDOWS OPEN TOWARDS JERUSALEM

The following was a business man's sermon, and preached for the sake of an individual. Probably there were many more like him in the congregation, but I only knew the one man whom I sought to help. He was not a church-goer: that is to say, he attended no place of worship on Sundays, although he was a regular attendant at the Thursday service. Years before he had been put out of touch with religious work by some real or fancied affront —in fact he seemed to have been rather hardly and unsympathetically used. He was now willing to make a fresh start, but could not help blazing out at the meanness and unscrupulousness of the treatment meted out to him in business by professing Christians. I still see this hearer sitting in the midst of the city men Thursday by Thursday. Whether this particular sermon helped him or no I never knew, but it reached one or two young fellows who were beginning to find out that success has its penalties, of which envy is one.

III

"Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house, and his windows being opened in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime."—DANIEL vi. 10.

THE book of Daniel has long been a subject of controversy amongst scholars, and is a favourite with some who profess to find in it indications concerning the political future of the world. For the present, however, you and I need not concern ourselves with questions of scholarship or prophecy. Our text is plain enough; it has a meaning and a value independent of both. Neither the scholar nor the would-be prophet, foreteller of events I mean, has aught to say that can add anything to the force and the commanding personal appeal of our text. Let us look first at the meaning, and then at the value which the meaning indicates.

Here is a great man, Daniel by name, who is a stranger in a strange land, one of a captive people; but, like so many of his race, he is found to be useful to the reigning house in the country where he now is; and so he is preferred before even the subjects of the same race as the king himself; and we are told the king thought to set him over the whole realm. You know enough about human nature to

be aware of what would happen. In this case, at any rate, the writer of this book was inspired by experience. It was with Daniel as with Merlin in "The Idylls of the King":—

> "Sweet were the days when I was all unknown.
> But when my name was lifted up, the storm
> Brake on the mountain, and I cared not for it.
> Right well know I that fame is half disfame,
> Yet needs must work my work."

Daniel appears to have gone quietly on the path which not the king but God had marked out for him; lived his life, did his duty. His practice was to keep his soul right towards God by this meditation three times a day. He would enter into his private room, open his window towards Jerusalem, the home of his love, in order that he might remind himself of his allegiance to the God of Israel, and that he had no abiding city in Babylon. What was the king to him, and all the king's honour? Yonder, at Jerusalem, in the service of Israel's God, were Daniel's thought and Daniel's hope.

Now observe the devilry that is set on foot. The king loves his talented subject, and so by guile Daniel's foes have to make a way through that devotion to encompass the destruction of their rival; they suggested the king's vanity the way in which this might be done. There is to be no prayer for three days. Who ever dreams that Daniel would intermit his devotion for that? Now can you see them slinking round outside the chamber of his devotion

and looking up: "Has he the window open? Just what we expected!" "Then they came near *and told the king.*" Is not that true to life? You do not need to look very far for the meaning of my text now; and if the sermon were to stop at this point, every one of you could supply the application. It is just possible that some man present might be saying to himself, "I am sorry you have chosen this particular illustration of what human nature knows to be true; what a childish tale this is about a man being flung into the lions' den and coming out unhurt! Tell it to children." Well, I am telling it to grown men. It may seem to you altogether irrational, but I actually believe it. I remember listening to Dr Parker's posthumous message to the Free Churches, which contained something of a remonstrance against a certain kind of Biblical scholarship in these terms:—"We are now told that there was no den, that there were no lions, and, worst of all, that there was no Daniel." If my revered predecessor were here this morning, I would point out Daniel to him in the congregation. For in this story we have a very vivid picture of ordinary human life, and an epitome of the destiny of many and many a true servant of God. I am looking into the face of some men who are being committed to the den of lions, and will find themselves there before this afternoon is out. I would talk to them as from the heart of God; and this is all I have to say. You know where you are going, do you not?

You know the writing is signed; open the windows towards Jerusalem; no compromise with the enemy; be as though he were not there. We have no abiding city here, but seek a city out of sight. You will be a better citizen of this world if you live in the full vision of the next.

Let me take that youngster, perhaps the youngest male hearer that I have this morning, and I will tell you about his life. He is, as the cynic would say, cursed with a conscience. He has just earned his little piece of success. He stands well with his employer; he has worked hard enough to get there, and it seems as if the road is opening before him, and life will bring him some good things by-and-bye. Here is the enemy. This young man is finding he has to pay his price for his success—calumny, petty persecution, inflicted in ways which are difficult to fix and to face out; and sometimes you are almost inclined to turn cynic yourself. Then the preacher comes along and says: "Open the windows towards Jerusalem. Look back along the line of history to One who stood in that fateful city at Pilate's judgment seat. Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself; and when He was reviled, reviled not again." "Ah, yes!" is the response, "but I cannot see Christ in business." I am thankful you cannot, unspeakable thankful; for if you could, a great moral opportunity that you have now would never be yours at all; for persecuted and persecutor would both be on the side of Christ,

seeing Him in power and great glory. There is a moral value in not knowing too much; mystery hath its uses. If you could see things as they actually are you would never even talk about the Cross, you would not hesitate as to what you ought to do. Do it now, as if you could see. Wait a moment. I said you could not see Christ. Open the windows toward Jerusalem, and gaze through the things that are seen to the things that are not seen. Look into the face of the Master and you will see something that the world cannot see, and it will keep you true. Human nature is capable of many damnable things, even now; and lest I should be held to be prophesying smooth things and telling nursery tales instead of God's word, I would just say this: you may have worse to suffer yet; this may only be the beginning. The writing is signed; you may not know it, or you may; go on as if you did not know; go to your God; open the windows of your soul heavenward, and leave the rest to Him.

We will take that woman—pure and good—who is the breadwinner in a certain family; but she has to earn her living for herself and the rest in the presence of foul and humiliating insult. Most men here will know that I am not imagining this. It is true of I know not how many in this sanctuary to-day. There are some times when you feel that you can bear no more, and will let the consequences be what they may; you must retreat from this position of hardship and shame. You have no one to

tell. It is astonishing how few there are in the world to whom man or woman can disclose their whole soul. But as the living has to be won, and for somebody else who cannot win it if you do not, I think I know what you must do. The writing is signed, and it seems as though the lions are waiting; but you must go back. Open the windows toward Jerusalem; the world does not have it all its own way. There is God, and He is just, and He is strong. "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Fear nothing, save to compromise with the Highest. Live where He is, for as He is so are we in this world.

Take this business man—to whom I meant to speak at first. You are finding every day, as it were, the penalty of succeeding in almost anything, it matters not what. It seems as if life is all battle. What a weary game it is, this making money in the City! What a rest, what a relief to get home at night and leave the lions for a while! You know what professional jealousy means: you know what it is to make an implacable, inveterate, unsleeping enemy who will hit you under the belt every time he can. Sometimes you are tempted to get the blow in first, to bring down the standard of conduct and right doing and right feeling. Never submit to that temptation: it is the business man's *par excellence*. It is so difficult to keep a humble heart, a pure spirit, and a childlike attitude to God, when

you are fighting like a man beset on the stricken field, and heaven so far away. Well, be the man; keep the windows open toward Jerusalem. The higher vision will save you from the shame of falling in this world of a thousand temptations to the strong man. Let the indications be what they may, let threatenings be all they seem, your God is stronger than they all. God and one make a majority.

Just as I came up the pulpit stairs, the sexton handed me this little spring token[1] from one of my City men. I have been looking to this man for some time for little loving tokens of this kind. From his card I see that he is an Artist and a Scot, and his house is named after that little piece of gorse I hold in my hand, which by the way a Scotsman does not call gorse. It must be a figure of his own life. There is the golden flower of success, and here are the thorns that make it so I can scarcely hold it. It reminds me of the experience of a brother artist of this man, told me a little while ago. He has just got some plans into the Royal Academy, and he showed me the only unfavourable, even a venomous, notice of them which appeared in a paper. He said, "Would you think that this man is not speaking his real sentiments at all, perhaps never saw the plans? But I happened to pass him in a competition a little while ago, and he has been waiting for me ever since." Just so, that is the way the world does. It is a curious thing that out of all this

[1] A small bouquet of gorse covered with golden blossoms.

multitude this morning there is not a single man who can say he never had an experience of the kind, and never knew what it was to provoke the hostility of a man to whom he had never done any harm. Nor does it matter; be prepared for that; it is the writing that fronts all opportunity for moral heroism. The world will never give you any credit for the better motive if there are two from which to choose. Disinterestedness is seldom believed in. What is his game? is the question, if you will excuse the homely parlance, that is asked of any man's conduct when it even seems to be unselfish. But why do people get soured when they find that this is so? That is the world's writing: they are looking to see if you have your window open. Open it as if the world were not there. "Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny."

There are some specially trying times in every man's life, and it may be that yours—if I speak to only one man in this place—has now arrived. Now I would most earnestly point out the real danger to you in these seasons of trial. It is not what you think it is. It is of a double kind. First, that evil aimed at you may arouse in you a like evil. A sinister mood tends to reproduce itself. Secondly, fear of a threatening evil may lead you to bow to the storm, and to lower your flag, to turn ever so little from the path of strict rectitude. Do not succumb to either suggestion. You meet a man

who dislikes you—instinctively you know it—and you repay him in kind. Your heart is beating quicker when you are in his presence, but it is not with a good emotion. Or you hear of a man who is scheming to ruin you, and forthwith you hit him with all your might. He would never do you any harm if there were no ally within your own soul. There is a danger from which to flee. To repay evil with evil is the worst possible policy you could adopt. When our Lord left us the exhortation, "Love your enemies; pray for them who despitefully use you," He uttered the strictest common sense. That is your only way of safety. We have all heard Cromwell's dying prayer. Did you ever notice how singularly beautiful and noble was the closing petition?—"Pardon those who would trample upon the dust of a poor worm, for they are Thy people too." It is always difficult to be just to an enemy; it cannot be done until you get into that Cromwell spirit, which was the Christ spirit before it was his. The ignoble thing would be to take a different ground, and even in thought to repay evil with evil; the noblest, the wisest, the safest, is to take the ground that Daniel took. When he knew that the writing was signed, he went back into his room and opened the windows toward Jerusalem. There is always a highest—live there. There is always a holiest—look there. Fear nothing, save to tamper with your own conscience. Be brave and true, and trust in God. "Yea, though I walk

through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me."

It may be that these City men who have gathered within these walls to worship this morning for a little while, or some of them, are going back to the most trying experience of their life. Well, go; do not shirk it; the way to Beulah-land may lie straight through the Valley of the Shadow, and if it does be sure of this: God will be no nearer in Beulah-land than in the dark valley; and evil can do no more in the dark valley than in Beulah-land. As you go back to your business to-day, remember to keep the windows open toward Jerusalem.

A year ago, when I first came here, I had on Thursday afternoons several At Homes, in order to make the acquaintance of friends and visitors, and I remember one day a man came in to speak to me whom I had never seen before and have never seen since. He had a shy, half-shamefaced way that often men have in exposing a weak side to another man. He said to me, "You were speaking this morning in a figure thus: You described a man hanging from a prison wall all night, dreading to drop into safety. I have been hanging on for a year or two, dreading to let go, because I feared it would not be safety; it would be a precipice over which I should fall. Pardon me for saying it, sir. I am sorely tempted to put myself right in a way that once upon a time I should never have dreamed

I could even entertain in thought. What am I to do?" At first I thought he had come, as so many do, to ask that I should put him right. I was thankful I did not say so; for in another moment he said, "Mind you, neither you nor any other man can save me; if ruin comes it will be on too big a scale for you or for anyone else to avert the catastrophe. What I want to know is this: Knowing as I do that my little ones are sleeping at home, and that this harassment is hanging over me, and that if I fail they suffer too, what am I to do?" I said, "Do you really need to ask a preacher?" His reply was, "I think not; but if I refuse to do what I am sorely tempted to do, what then? Ruin—failure." I said, "Perhaps so. Go back to your business, and fail; and when your life story comes to be told —and it may be a long while yet—praise God for the success. You have not done; it seems to you so simple to take the selfish wrong road, to go down because the hill is so steep to climb." "No," he said, "not that. What I am afraid of is, I am going down." I said, "If you go, underneath are the everlasting arms. A man falls into the hands of God—the safest place, be he sinner or be he saint. Go there." I have never heard from him what happened; I sometimes feel I would like to know. For I can parallel that story. I could show men who do not stand so high up in the world as they used to do; but they are thankful that conscience is clean. They know it was worth while to

take the straight road; they know it was the wisest plan to do the right thing; they know it were better to bequeath to their children a father's noble character than to sin for the sake of temporary deliverance. They know that in the den of lions there was no evil, for the Lord of Hosts was there. The God of Heaven has His own way of delivering those that put their trust in Him. The Eternal God is our refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. Brother men, keep your hearts pure and sweet and clean. Keep your soul open towards God. Live your life with the windows open toward Jerusalem. Trust in God and do the right.

THE MISUSE OF DIVINE POWER

THIS sermon was an attempt to reach some successful commercial men who were among the casual hearers at the City Temple. Worshippers they were not, for their estimate of Christian character had, somehow, become sadly vitiated. A friend sent me a line saying a group of these commercial men were in London and would be at service on Sunday evening. The bow was drawn at a venture, and not in vain.

IV

"Then saith Pilate unto Him, Speakest Thou not unto me? knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee, and have power to release Thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered Me unto thee hath the greater sin."—St John xix. 10, 11.

There is a moral tragedy enacted here. There seems to have been a certain understanding between Jesus and the Roman Governor who condemned Him to death. We can see this by the demeanour of the governor in the presence of the prisoner. They changed places. Pilate seems to confess his inferiority by his very uneasiness and by the respect that breathes through all his utterances to Jesus. We have already pointed out one or two of these during the reading of our lesson. But here is another, a sort of impulsive, feverish, not very dignified remonstrance directed against Jesus because He keeps silence in the face of his accusers. Pilate wishes to show at his best in the presence of these chief priests and scribes who are watching him with jealous eye, ready to denounce him to his own imperial master if he does not do what they want. Jesus stands quietly but majestically in the midst, the King that Pilate had confessed Him to be, and answers never a word. Then petulantly the governor expostulates in the terms of our text,

"Answerest Thou nothing? Speakest Thou not unto me? Knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee and I have power to release Thee?" Then our Lord speaks. He knows that this poor puppet of the Roman Emperor, this plaything of the scheming priests, has no power at all. What is more, He knows that the governor is himself aware of it. He has a great opportunity, and he is flinging it aside. Nay, further, He dares to utter the hard saying that even they, like Pilate, must have derived their power for mischief from the fact that it was first a power for good, entrusted to them by the Lord of Glory Himself. "Thou couldest have no power at all against Me except it were given thee from above."

But there was something Pilate could have done. He might have been, as I have elsewhere said, the first on the roll of the Christian martyrs. He had no power to save Jesus. If he had released Him at the moment it would only have been to take his place beside Him later. He had not moral courage to do what his heart prompted him to do, and he felt it was right to do, speak for Jesus, face His accusers, because he knew what the consequences would be. Had it been otherwise there would have been a fourth cross erected upon Calvary, nay, perhaps there would have been only two, no brigand being crucified beside Jesus, but only the Roman governor who tried to save Him, and died a martyr for his nobleness.

Pilate felt that Jesus was not of earth, but of heaven. He knew He was a Son of God, though he could not have said just whence His authority was derived, but felt, as we all feel, the power, the grandeur, the majesty of His character. He knew that he was committing a foul crime in handing Him over to a cruel death. Far better if we had been able to speak of Pilate to-night as the first man in all history to suffer and die for Christ. He let the opportunity go. It availed him nothing, for if tradition is to be believed, his end was tragical after all. But the Christ knew at the moment what was at stake, and our text is an expostulation to the governor. In fact, it is the holding up of an ideal and an invitation to it. "Thou hast no power. He that delivered Me unto thee hath the greater sin." Thine is but the power which will bring destruction it may be upon thyself, the power of choosing the right with the certainty of suffering at the end. As for the priests, what for them? Jesus said nothing to them. They were more difficult to deal with than the governor, more vicious hypocrites by far. They would not enter into the judgment-hall for fear of being defiled, but they were doing a hateful and abominable thing when they sent Christ there to be destroyed. They were serving their own ends, giving vent to their own guilty passions, and in doing so they were taking upon their lips the name and authority of God. It was in the name of religion that they denounced Him to their own

people. It was in the name of political principle that they denounced Him to the Roman governor. Knowing so, they put Him out of the way. You can feel that Pilate's failure, tragical as it was, was not half so tragical as the failure of those priests with the power that had been given unto them by God. Leaders and teachers of the people as they were, they well understood what Jesus meant when He said, "He that delivered Me unto thee hath the greater sin." For they deliberately employed the God-given power, knowing that they were doing it to destroy the God-sent messenger. They must have felt who Jesus was, but even if they did not they must have felt what Jesus was, and yet in the face of their knowledge they sent Him to death, and the power by which they sent Him was the power that they claimed to be divine.

Power is always a dangerous gift. It may be used for high ends, or it may be employed to blast and to destroy high things. The late Mr Gladstone once said, nearly at the close of his life, that the tendency of power was always to demoralise its possessor. The nineteenth century, he asserted, had in this country been a century of political emancipation. The people, using the word in its general sense, were coming to their own. The power was now placed in their hands, and the question the great Christian statesman put to England was, How are the people going to use that power? for, judging by the lessons of history,

it has nearly always been that the possession of power meant anything but a noble use thereof. In the French Revolution, for example, we see what power in popular hands was capable of doing. People began by coming to their own. Under the influence of the eloquence of a Mirabeau and a Rousseau, they claimed in the name of high ideals to dispossess the men who had sinned against the God-given trust. Then the guillotine was set up, and rivers of blood flowed in that devoted city, the capital of that fair land. When I was there a few days ago, and read, written upon the outside of nearly every public building, "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity," I could not but remember that those words had been placed there in the time of tumult and lust for blood, all done by the power which the possessors were asserting was given by high destiny for high use. How did it end? We all know how it passed into the hands of vicious and villainous men. Perhaps they were not vicious or villainous before they received it. Few can bear to be the trustees of power. Power in the hands of religion has worked some of the most diabolical evils in history, not to speak of politics, and it is all the more dangerous because it can make a weapon of religious zeal. One of the saddest chapters in the history of mankind is the chapter of religious persecution. We who are accustomed to hear it now afar off can scarcely bear to tolerate the name of the system which used it for the worst, but there

are few of us who can claim to be religious at all who have much right to speak in this regard. When the Congregationalism of which so many of us in this building to-night are so proud, and in which we have so great confidence, had the upper hand, it used the sword, and it used it badly, and in some cases used it wickedly. Is this spirit gone? Is the danger past that even religion cannot bear to be the possessor of power? It is not gone. The danger is not by any means past. By this door to-day enter hypocrisy, cant, religious lies, intolerance, bigotry, self-righteousness, a disposition to make another suffer for his opinions. And most detestable and hateful of all, it frequently happens that such pain is caused and such evil is done in the name of God. The fires of hell are lighted the moment a man gives rein to bad passions, and names God or even Christ as reason for his doing so. And God permits it, too. A great gift for usefulness may become a curse, and often has done. Too often the gift is not buried, like the talent in the earth. It is put out to usury for the devil. Surely there must be a reckoning day for this, the worst of all sins, the deliberate misuse of the power that comes from God.

So far, perhaps, most of us have felt fairly safe from inclusion in this indictment. Most of us feel that we have never had much power to misuse. It is my strong and increasing conviction that a good deal of the cant and hypocrisy around us nowadays

is to be found amongst those who imagine themselves to be freest from it. I need hardly instance in an audience of this kind, promiscuous as it is, what I feel to be the mistaken spirit of some evangelistic Christians of the present hour. We have read of, and we constantly hear of, the fierceness and the intolerance of the spirit of injured Nonconformity. Granted the injury, I deplore with you the spirit in which the injury is too often met. There is a certain arrogance and self-righteousness about a good deal of our reasoning and our protest of to-day that I would to God could be swept away by a nobler spirit.

To-night, however, I am addressing men who are neither Churchmen nor Nonconformists. I am addressing some who can afford to be quizzical, because they are of the great crowd that looks on. I was asked this morning to speak a word to-night directly to commercial men, and I am informed that amongst my congregation there are many this evening who are not in the habit of giving in their adherence to any particular form of religious profession. Now, it would be perfectly easy while I spoke the words in the former part of my sermon to-night for you to be saying to yourselves, It is quite true; we know how vicious, how vitriolic the religious spirit can be in the name of religious zeal, how men can give vent to their worst natures in the name of the highest principle, but thank goodness we do not belong to that particular set.

We are in the position of being able to say, "A plague on both your houses." Well, now, I would with all respect point out to you, addressing you as a man to men, and not as one on any special pedestal of authority—point out to you that in this principle you are only entitled to repudiate a lower in the name of a higher. I often feel that the man of the world, who is rather proud than otherwise of the name, is by no means entitled to denounce excess of religious zeal or the unloveliness of the average religious character. There are not very many things so dangerous as the spirit of the cynic engaged in rebuking sin. And there is a good deal of it. There is a section of the secular Press, which, pretending to be superior to all creeds and denominations, looking down upon them all and smiling at them all, sets up an ideal which in spirit is anything but an improvement on that they would condemn. Have you ever heard the cynic in private life pointing out another man's evil motive, and have you not felt that there was something poisonous about his very presence? The cynic is a danger in any society. The cynic is a special danger when he poses as the destroyer of false ideals. He has nothing but a worse to put in their place.

Now, brethren, I put my question to you again. As you are only entitled to repudiate a lower in the name of a higher, I would ask you what are you doing with your life? You who have, as most of

you have, a respect for the name of Jesus, but very little respect for His so-called followers, what are you doing with God's gift of power as it has been afforded unto you? It is easy for you to imagine yourselves to be standing on the side of Christ, as it were, in that historic scene in Pilate's hall and to be speaking for the Master rather than to be taking your seat upon the judge's bench. Nay, it is only too possible that from the judge's bench you may pass to the ranks of Annas and Caiaphas and the crowd. And the man who refuses to have anything to do with religion because he can see nothing that is noble, no high incentive in the religious example of those about him, puts himself in the spirit of the priests who condemned Jesus because of the envy they felt for a higher than their own. If you can see nothing admirable in the life of the Christian Church, I would ask you what are you putting in its place? Have you a higher ideal of manhood and life and love and duty, and are you living to it? Because if you are, then, and not till then, are you entitled with authority to say, "A plague on this or that false ideal which assumes upon the lips of its professors the name of God."

A little while ago we were visiting Switzerland. Some of our party began to ascend one day one of the highest peaks in that particular district where we were staying. You have all heard of the edelweiss, a plant that grows usually in almost inaccessible spots in these mountain regions. I

noticed that some of the inhabitants of the district were selling the edelweiss in the valleys before we began to ascend the mountain at all, and, like the rest, I bought a bunch of it. When I reached home I found on one of my bookshelves a poem descriptive of the ideal, the strenuous ideal, of the man who gathers his edelweiss from the mountain top and the craggy steep and the inaccessible crevasse, higher, far higher than the common earth, high above our ordinary levels of daily life. I thought to myself, "I got my edelweiss easily. Someone else gathered it, I but carried it home." And as a general rule and all through history you will find there has been some hero gathering the edelweiss. It has been easy for other men to take it home afterwards. Some have laboured, some have suffered, we, their inheritors, have but entered into their labours. How seldom you meet the heroic temper anywhere. How seldom you meet the man who is prepared to lose for the advocacy of a principle. How seldom you meet a man who will shoulder responsibility and go bravely forward for an ideal though he be the only one to profess it, and how much more seldom you find a man who will do that in a Christlike spirit. Oh, it is difficult to be intense and at the same time to be tolerant. It is difficult to be in deadly earnest and at the same time to remain benevolent. Too often when we have scaled a certain height, and seen a certain vision and garnered a certain harvest, then we have begun to trifle with the ideal

and confess it with our lips when the spirit of it has gone. It is as if we had handed Christ over to be crucified afresh and in so doing had given back the power granted to us. Nay, worse than that, misused it, employed it for other ends than God gave it to us at the first.

You have your special dangers, my fellow men, business men, though you are a fine manly set of men—to take you as a whole. May I ask what your dangers are and ask you whether you can answer the question along with me? The first you will say is obviously the rush to make money. Nothing of the kind. It is thundered in the pulpit and in the religious press to-day as the greatest danger of our time, the rush to grab and to get. It is not, there is a danger anterior to that. It is the coarsening of our aspirations, it is the fading of idealism from our national life, and you commercial men are specially prone to it if you will permit me without offensiveness to say so. All men become like their pursuits. A man's thoughts determine him. As he thinketh in his heart so is he. You can be very very selfish and apologise to yourself for that of which you know you are guilty by saying it is not possible to be anything else and yet be a successful business man. You have very little time, I know, to read, to think, to pray. You are a little inclined to be contemptuous of these things and of a man in earnest too. If there is a type of character that you detest more than another it is that of the religious pro-

fessor who is living no better life than you. Now, to be honest, I would ask you to look beneath your own profession and see if you are not sometimes guilty of that of which you accuse him. You have power. Up to a certain point you have used it well. You have a type of manhood to which you give the term of approval. But are you using your power for higher ends than those with which you began to gain it? It is God's trust to you. Are you using it as well to-day as when it was first given, or are you using it to crucify the Christ in yourself? You do this every time you deliberately act from a base or a sordid motive. Materialism on a petty scale is the bane of a good many of the men I am addressing to-night. You may be guilty of putting your own soul to death, and all the while have the spirit of self-satisfied superiority about it. The religious man does not seem to be so very detestable and contemptible, after all, when you bring him into the presence of an ideal like yours, for what, after all, is the world better for the man who condemns the failure of another to live to a high ideal, which he himself never dreams of even trying to reach?

We will go a little closer to the subject. Here is another danger of the commercial man. You have, it is true, a sort of good-fellowship, a notion of a good comrade, but of what kind should we say a good fellow should be? It is not true that the religious talker sins against the social ideal, as you sometimes accuse him of doing, and yet I do not

want you to be a religious talker. Is not this true, however, that very often our good-fellowship means that every man in a certain company is talking and is acting below his own habitual level? We seem ashamed of moral dignity. Let those who have never been guilty of falling below what they know to be their best selves when in the society of other men just pass this by, it does not concern them. But unless I am mistaken, I have heard in the presence of commercial men and professional men, too, and the ordinary man about town, I have heard conversation which I felt sure was below the level, the ordinary level, of every man in that company. I have seen young fellows whose character was being blighted, and blighted by the example of their elders and no man protested, and I have felt that in the presence of ideals which were the exact opposite of those in which you were trained from your childhood some of the men who knew better and were living better might have intervened to save a lad from corruption. Not the religious talker, again I say, is wanted. We want the man who is prepared to live up to the high moral standard that his conscience feels to be the best he has ever seen. The thing to be feared to-day is not wrong religious notions, it is moral flabbiness. The thing to be dreaded to-day is not vicious, petty religious intolerance, it is that men will let go the standard that conscience has set up. The danger to-day is that men cease to care about certain offences against righteousness; the

danger is lest fineness of feeling be at a discount; the danger to such men as you is, I am afraid, that sometimes you neglect the higher duty in the pursuit of the lower. Are you not guilty, then, of deliberate sin, not against religious creeds, but against what is written in letters of fire on every man's heart, the moral standard of Jesus Christ? George Eliot said, some time near to her death, that she started life with three ideals, three points of anchorage—God, immortality, and duty. She said the third was the only one that she held most certain at the end. God seemed to fade out of her life, belief in immortality went, too, but to duty she had clung to the last, and for her duty she was prepared to suffer and die. Robertson of Brighton, at the religious crisis of his life, as most of you know, spoke of his experience in similar terms. He was not quite sure what creed embodied the truth, if indeed any did at all, but of one thing he was perfectly certain, that the eternal laws of righteousness claimed his obedience, and he felt at the worst it was better to be pure than impure, better to be clean than unclean, better to strive honestly and earnestly after the highest he had seen than to let these things go, and speak as if they did not matter.

Duty is a creed that will lead you into the fulness of truth. Follow the divine manhood at whatever cost. Keep your heart pure and your standard high. I know of the fierceness of the struggle in which so few of you succeed. I know how little you have

to hope ever to become men of wealth and power as the world counts it. If there be one or two rich men here to-night there can hardly be more, probably all the rest of you who are busy in the ordinary business battle never expect to do more than secure a competence. What I would ask you to do is this, Never be crushed underneath material burdens, no matter what they may be. Keep your soul clean and your vision clear. And it is possible, nay, it is more than possible, it is certain, God has given you the power of doing it, and for that power you are responsible to Him.

Take that lad, now, who will be with you to-night when you get back to your hotel, and in your commercial room will be listening to his elders, to the ideals that you have set before him as being proper and ordinary for business men. This lad has just come from a country home. He knows very little of the great world. He talks as if he did. He will try to conceal his ignorance from you for fear of being laughed at, and presently perhaps he may be laughed at because he has some of the associations, some of the vestiges, some of the influences of a religious home still clinging about him. You find him out. Do you make it easier for that lad to live the right life, the good life, the straight and pure life, or do you make it harder by the atmosphere into which he has come? Come, now, business men, face this fact together. Some day you hear that he has gone wrong—somebody is

going wrong every day from such concerns as yours and such ordinary walks of life, as you know best. This lad goes wrong—drink or women, or both. Then you have to ask the question, What sent him wrong? and when you meet him in your little society, to take up the old-time conversation and to advocate the old-time ideals, and to make the old-time denunciations of other people whom you accuse of being canting hypocrites, you have to account for that young man's ruin. You say his vices destroyed him. True they did, but something destroyed him before the vices gripped him, and that was the atmosphere, the moral atmosphere, of the business house into which he was introduced. Remember this, the vices were but as Pilate on the bench. They had power, to be sure they had, and he could have defied them if he liked. God had given him power greater than they, but the vices were only the Pilate, and you may have been the Caiaphas. What ideal did you set before him? He was weaker than you; you could go to the very verge of ruin and turn back. It was not the wine, it was not the women, it was his associates that destroyed his life, as they are being destroyed in hundreds and thousands throughout this great land of England to-day, and it is no cant and hypocrisy I am talking now. Manhood and only manhood can save him. If there is one thing more than another that we need in England to-day, it is

tolerant, open-hearted manhood, manhood beneath which the weak can shelter. Manhood is a trust from God. Manhood is a God-given power, and for our manhood we must give account at last when we stand before the great white throne.

Let me tell you a case now in point where manhood has come to the rescue. I have a friend in Edinburgh, a well-known preacher, getting on in years. I will not name him, but if you choose to guess his name I shall not be offended. It happened on one occasion the following incident came under his notice, indeed, formed part of his experience. A commercial man was in the habit of going to listen. One Sunday it struck him that the preacher was discouraged about something, did not seem to be himself, failed in giving his message with his usual power. So he thought, after having heard him for so many years he was entitled to turn comforter himself. He made his way to the preacher on the Monday morning to tell him this. First about himself. "Years ago," he said, "under the inspiration of your ministry I made up my mind to do two things. First, I would buy a new book every week and I would read it to keep my soul from being fossilised by the things with which I have to deal day by day, to keep before me the divine ideal. But, secondly, I made up my mind that I should not be merely passive amongst the men with whom I have to deal, but if I could bring any man to the better life by my example, by my invitation, it

should be done. I have never posed as being a man of prominently worthy religious character, but now and then I have asked a friend to step with me here and listen to you. I thought I would come this morning and tell you that last night you gripped a man's conscience and changed a man's life, and I think God must be glad." "Well," replied my friend, "you have told me that, now I have something to tell you." And he opened a drawer and showed this man of commerce a dozen or twenty letters received from commercial men who had been brought to that place of worship by him, and who said it was not merely on his invitation that they came, but on his life. They felt his goodness, his unselfishness, his worth, his Christlike character, although he seldom talked lip-language about Christ. Here was an ideal, practically it is the only ideal that I care to commend to you.

I care very little, business men, whether you believe in my doctrine or no, I care a great deal whether you believe in the moral standard I have set before you or no. The one thing that matters is right living and the only thing about which you and I will be asked in the great day will be how we have used our life. Because we are not alone, we do not stand or fall to ourselves and ourselves only. All around us there are lives that touch ours. An atmosphere has to be created, created by manhood at its best, and you can live the Christ life with the simplest faith in Him without making any very loud

profession of doctrine at all. And yet I tell you that to-day, just as much as in that old-time day of which we have been reading to-night, the trial is going forward in the judgment-hall and we are either standing with Christ upon the floor or sitting with Pilate upon the bench, or we are with the gibbering, hateful priests outside. In which company of the three are you and I to be found? I would like to be with that commercial man in the great day of reckoning and revelation, for when he and the Master meet face to face Jesus will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Will He say it, does He say it, can He say it to you and to me? He hath granted us a great trust. Not a man of us can repudiate the knowledge of it. We are placed where we are for no trifling reason, but that we may witness for God and right and truth. Are we doing it, or are we already judged and condemned?

A FORFEITED GIFT

This sermon was preached to a backslider. I have sorrowfully to confess that it was preached in vain.

V

"He wist not that the Lord had departed from him."—Judges xvi. 20.

Every country has its particular accumulation of legend and tradition and folk-lore. Our own, for instance, has its Song of Beowulf; its legend concerning a character who is certainly historic, though we know very little about him — King Alfred; and the stories in which children delight and which the adults have not forgotten concerning the famous outlaw Robin Hood. Switzerland has its William Tell, though how much that is told about him to the modern tourist is the truth, who shall say? In Germany it is Friedrich Barbarossa, Norway has its King Olaf; Denmark its hero who lies asleep until the hour of Denmark's greatest peril, and then he is to awake and save it. Probably all the beautiful and interesting stories that have gathered around characters like these have had their origin in some fact. Some outstanding man has impressed himself upon the imagination of his time by the grandeur of his achievements, and his memory has not been allowed to die.

The story which has been written around our text is just one of these. It belongs to the half-historic legend and folk-lore of Israel I do not

regard it as literal history, but there is a truth to be disentangled—disengaged is a better word—from its setting. The modern mind would, almost without investigation, repudiate the thaumaturgical element here. That any man was ever endowed with miraculous power because he was a Nazarite, unshaven from birth, seems to be out of character —certainly it was out of harmony—with the facts of ordinary everyday experience. But cannot the plain, stolid, Anglo-Saxon intellect see beneath the imagery here and take away the dress in which this hero of old time is presented to us? Here is a man with a gift—that is one prime fact—raised up for a great work, and he must have been faithful to it up to a point, or Israel would not have remembered him. But he became false to it, by arrogant self-indulgence. And the worst of it was he is not the only one in history of whom it may be said that the gift departed from him, that his vocation was forfeited and at the end he himself was ignorant of the fact.

All of you can see therefore in my text a world of meaning, always true to human experience as you and I know it whether we retain or whether we dismiss the particular setting of this life-story.

Before passing on I would remind, at any rate, the younger members of my congregation, that the Bible and particularly the Old Testament is always to be read in the light of Christ. Three-quarters of the questions you ask concerning its difficulties would

disappear if you would just remember that simple principle. Whether it be its miracles or its moral standard, you must think of the Bible and what it has to tell in the terms of the Christ and what we know of Him.

Now we cannot approach even this story without taking with us something that we have learned from Calvary, and when with our knowledge of Jesus we come to investigate the life-story of Samson, the lesson is not far to seek. Painters and poets have made it their theme, because of the tragedy with which this great life closed, and I suppose most of you here present are familiar with the great poem of one of the greatest of our national prophets, upon this theme, the fall, the failure, and the death of one who might have been a mighty power for good in the history of the world.

Up to a point, as I have said, he was. Beyond that point he failed, and did not see that he was serving himself instead of his Maker. He fell. The fall and the death of Samson are illustrative of a recurrent human experience. Unfaithfulness to a divine gift results in its withdrawal. In a sense all men are divinely gifted, though their gifts differ both in quality and in degree, which is precisely what we ought to expect. No man in this congregation to-night is precisely in characteristics, personal history, and destiny, what anyone else is or ever has been. You are each of you unique in the history of mankind. There is a divine inbreathing in every

soul that comes to moral consciousness in this world. Some characters stand out from their fellows, but perhaps their prominence is more apparent than real. Who knows what the perspective of heaven would show concerning the comparative worth of the men and women who are gathered before me in this house to-night, and whose very names I do not know? In history, however, and particularly in Bible history, we are well acquainted with examples of the principle I have just been trying to place before you. Suppose Samson had lived and died like the great lawgiver of Israel—who can think about Moses without believing his estimate of manhood is better for that life? Joshua, who, inspired by a greater than himself, hearing his divine call, "Moses my servant is dead, now therefore arise," rose captain of Israel, faithful to the call, was faithful to the last, in his dying hour, calling Israel before him, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve." Elijah, the most picturesque of them all, a solitary figure in a decadent age, defying all the untoward tendencies of his time, witnessing for God and in the sublimity of his death impressing Israel for good, like Samson, but oh, in what a different fashion! Elijah wrought more by his death than he had wrought by his life, a purification of morals and manners that his testimony had never managed to accomplish. The removal of Elijah from the earthly scene shamed and impelled Israel to reform.

Suppose that Samson's life and death had been as

these—for he was called to the first place just as these were? He had his opportunity and he put it away. "He wist not that the Lord had departed from him." Vocation may be forfeited, and there is no tragedy so sad, no end so melancholy, as that in which a man discovers that he has been living for long without God and without the gift that might have led him to great things. As in the sacred, so in the so-called secular history of the world—is there any secular history? I venture to believe that there is not. We take our stand by the side of Socrates, who never heard of Israel's God, but lived and died in witness of the highest that he had ever seen, and even Moses did not die a nobler death than he; taking, as he said, a leap in the dark, but he was faithful to what he knew to be the divine charisma granted to him. St Bernard, in what we are now accustomed to call the dark ages, a simple monk, rejects all the honours of the world, and when no one else dares the task, stands before the crowned monarch who had been unfaithful in one of the most sacred ties which God has ever ordained to bind heart with heart and soul with soul. This king, because he was a king, would have entered the sanctuary, but was forbidden and repelled by the stern monk who shook Europe and the world. There was a divine gift upon St Bernard, and we feel, we see, we know the grandeur of the man. He was called, and he was not unfaithful to the call.

Compare these with characters whose testing, in some ways as great, ended in a sadness that makes us for pity bow the head. Cranmer, standing at the stake to die for his faith—how much more nobly he might have died if he had not had to hold in the flame the unworthy hand that signed his recantation. And Wolsey, as Mr Hughes was telling us a few nights ago, rising to the first place in the kingdom, and then forfeiting it, not because he was capable of the fearless testimony of a Bernard, not because he showed the courage of an Elijah upon Carmel, but because he halted between two opinions, not knowing which way the balance of royal favour might incline. Hear his dying words, "O, Cromwell, Cromwell, had I served my God as I have served my king, He would not have given me over in my grey hairs." Both Cranmer and Wolsey named the name of God to the last, claimed Him as upon their side, spoke as it were in the language of the Christ, knowing not, never reflecting that the spirit of the Lord had departed from them. Oh, history is full, it teems with instances in which men put off the day of reckoning, deceiving themselves, forfeiting the gift divine, trampling upon their own opportunities. They wist not that the day of the Lord was at hand and that the Spirit of the Lord had departed from them.

At first sight it might seem as though these considerations had little value for such an audience as I have present before me to-night. But such is far

from being the case. God's gift is bestowed upon every man in his degree and for his particular work. You have had your gracious opportunity, your season of vision, and whatever kind of man you are it will be of no use in the great day of reckoning for you to deny the moment when the charisma came. There is a judgment of surprises, it is true. "Lord, when saw we Thee sick or in prison or in necessity and did not minister unto Thee?" And the answer may come—"Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it not unto Me."

Do we know the opportunity when it comes? Can we recognise the voice eternal? Are we clear as to the moment when we stop our ears and close our eyes and turn our feet from the pathway of duty? Men mourn the consequences of sin more than they mourn the sin. We hear men lamenting that they did not see more clearly that the wages of sin was agony and shame. "Oh," they say, "how strangely is this moral universe ordered. We are not told about the other side of the wrong-doing." Every man buys his experience for himself, and when he finds it hard murmurs in surprise, he did not know. One thing you all know. You know that wrong is wrong. You know with what motive you do the evil service. You know for what object you leave a duty undone, you know when you juggle with the things that are necessary to true living, you know when you try to compromise with the ideals

that were given to you. You know perfectly well if this gift that is in you is debased, and when you know it you have rightly judged in the day of dread discovery that the Spirit of the Lord has departed.

Now let me examine at closer quarters what I have been trying to set before you thus plainly. It is sometimes said that the word of the prophet has no hearing in these days. Men are indifferent to the claims of the Christ. God has but little place in their lives. To a certain extent that is perfectly true. There are many men in this church to-night who hardly know why they are here—some it may be out of idle curiosity, some prepared to scoff at what they see and hear, some to whom the practices of devotion have no reality and no meaning, there is nothing in their lives upon which these things can take hold. Now, these are the very men to whom I have something to say. I do not begin protesting about my creed and urge you without argument and without sympathy and without explanation to accept mine. No, no, I have another way. I want to read yours, and ask you whether any man needs to argue about any justification of the creed that is written in letters of fire within your own soul.

Now, my friends, is it true of the men before me who reject God and Christ and the Bible, and with it all the ideals and associations that belong of right thereto—is it true that they are living the life of the highest they can see? Is it true of you that

you are living to the holiest you have seen? When you exchanged something else for Christ did you choose a higher or did you choose a lower? If you chose a lower, putting from you the higher, on whatever hypocritical pretext your choice was made, you did it knowingly, and you forfeited a great opportunity, and you thrust from you the divine gift. You were nearer God as a child than you are now, and therefore nearer truth and beauty and light and love. You saw further into the meaning of things as they are than you see to-day with all your worldly wisdom. It is so easy for a man to go wrong while naming the name of right, and talking as though life were still conformed to an ideal, when the back is turned upon the light all the same. "He wist not that the Lord had departed from him."

I will describe, if you will permit me for two minutes, the life of some of the men in this place who have never gone flagrantly wrong in all their days, who have been perfectly satisfied with themselves up to this moment. Is this true? Remember, I am choosing not the man who is deliberately wicked, I am speaking to a weaker being than he, for most of you are not particularly strong even in the world's way. Here is one typical London character, a man who is living for himself. He never acknowledges it to himself; not that he is absorbed in the pursuit of gain, because he is not particularly absorbed in the pursuit of anything.

He does not know the meaning of the word "sacrifice." So soon as a thing becomes difficult it is not for him. He cares nothing for that which brings to him no immediate and material return. He has no outlook beyond the immediate present. His aim is to get as much as possible out of life at as little as possible personal cost. How to amuse himself is the ideal of part of the young manhood of to-day, at any rate. Such a character pours ridicule upon the people who are in earnest, in earnest about anything. It seems to him infinitely absurd that people should preach or pray or labour for something greater than their own self-interest. He is superior to these things. How ridiculous looks the man who spends his time in advocating this cause or that cause. You are apt to ask, in your disbelief in unselfish motives, what is really at the bottom of the seemingly heroic acts of men who have, so far as you can see, nothing to gain by what they do. Poor fool that you are, dreaming that all is well when all is wrong, you are a meanly tragic failure. You do not even know that the failure is here already, sunning yourself in your own self-satisfaction, but knowing not that the glory of a day that once was yours has left you long ago. Some of you are sleeping the sleep of death in the lap of the harlot, but there will be a dread awakening by-and-by. It may be upon this side of the grave, it may be upon the other, but "God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he

also reap." It is perfectly true that you are able to silence the voice of conscience, perfectly true that you can banish your scruples one by one; perfectly true, and you know it, that manhood can deteriorate and a man respect himself less and less as the years go on. And yet it may never be acknowledged even to one's own heart, let alone to the world that waits and watches without. "He wist not that the Lord had departed from him."

Now, brethren, let us get close to the facts. You and I must do it some day, we may as well do it now. It is true that some amongst us are prostituting God's gifts to base ends? Who has ever been any better because you live? What have you added to the world's good? What do you purpose to do to-morrow with the manhood that God has granted to you? Does that question matter, or does it matter not? Oh, men of the twentieth century, and of England and of London, you have your place to fill and God has sent you to fill it. You have your work to do and only you can do it, and your opportunity is coming and you have known it and you know it now. God's gift rests upon you and you may be in danger of being false to it. Shall it be a dirge that is chanted over your life? Quite recently when we were in the Eternal City I paid a visit to that famous picture which everybody knows, in the Sistine Chapel, Michael Angelo's "Last Judgment." As we sat before the masterpiece in silence, as becomes him who would look upon such a work,

wrought in an age of wonders and dreams, I thought to myself that the Christ upon the throne there, the throne of judgment, is not my Christ—this Christ with a clean-shaven face, with an expression of implacability, hurling down to destruction the poor, wretched beings who had no longer opportunity for protest. That is not my Christ, but is more like the conqueror in a Roman triumph, more like Achilles in his chariot dragging Hector, vanquished, round the walls of Troy. But behind the idea of the stern painter I did see a truth, as many have seen it before him, and that you and I must face too. There is a Christ who will judge. Before that Christ we must all appear. If you could see—but you know it not—you are standing before Him now, and there is not a man among you, strong as you are and worldly-wise, who could face without tremor, agitation, or shame, if your life is conformed to the baser ideals, that Christ of glory Who once was crucified for you. And the reason why I think you would dread the Christ Who is Judge is just because He was the Christ of crucified purity and love.

Shall I tell you, if only in symbol, what I mean? Once a lad came to me, a young fellow just as some of you are, and asked me to help him in a difficulty, the very circumstances of which I have forgotten. I knew who he was, so I said, "Why did you not go to your father? He is a good man, upright, loving, true." "I could not face him," was the

answer. "I should just as soon expect the sun to fall from heaven as my father to compromise with what he knew to be right, either for himself or for me. I should have to pay to the uttermost farthing." And yet that father was not a hard man. The sinner feared the face of the man, a good man, inflexibly righteous. In all compassion that is worthy of the name there is a mingling of austerity. Who would dream of compromising with the ideal when we stand in the very presence of the Christ? Then you should not compromise with it now. "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."

There is no good in preaching except that there be a to-morrow. No preacher has the function of the herald of death. We are the heralds of life. When the last word comes to be spoken it will not be the prophet who speaks, it will be the Judge. It is the prophet who speaks now. The living Christ is calling to those who have ears to hear. His claim men can well admit, because He is the Highest. When I can find anything higher than Christ, then that becomes my creed forthwith. To Him we turn our eyes, the Giver of the ideal, and more than that, of the power to conform thereto.

> "Whoso hath felt the spirit of the highest
> Cannot confound nor doubt Him, nor deny;
> Yea, with one voice, O World, though thou deniest,
> Stand thou on that side, for on this am I."

Brother men, I am not calling you to anything un-

reasonable or impossible. Recognise that the divine gift rests upon you for just what you are and where you are, and that it can be withdrawn, and it may be. You are not living to your highest, and yet you could in the strength of the Lord God. Have you wandered away from it, turned your face from the light? Come back. The Master of us all is waiting to receive.

> "Come, lest this heart should, cold and cast away,
> Die ere the Guest adored she entertain,
> Lest eyes which never saw Thine early day
> Should miss Thy heavenly reign."

May the great God, to Whom all hearts are open, receive and reconsecrate every life in our midst unto His great service and to the glory of His great name.

THE WAY THROUGH THE FLOOD

The central experience of the sermon which bears this title is a piece of real life given in the illustration of the elderly man whose greatest trouble came in the evening of his life. He was a brave man, unselfish and good, so I spoke to him from the pulpit, and finished the sermon, so far as he was concerned, in the vestry.

VI

"As . . . the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water . . . the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the midst . . . until all the people were passed clean over Jordan."—Joshua iii. 15, 17.

We have a very striking historical incident herein referred to. I do not pretend to explain it as it stands in terms that would satisfy every critical mind; but, whatever the literal facts may have been, our text enshrines a spiritual truth to which the story here narrated lends vividness and power. I am not at all disposed to believe that this story is incredible; but it may well have been that, as handed down in the history of Israel, the facts recounted may not have been precisely as they took place. We have to read, as we would the narrative of a poet, a little between the lines, and fill in the details for ourselves. It must have been an incident that took very firm hold of the imagination of Israel, for it is told here with such vividness and power that apparently it had become a part of their folk-lore. It was told by the parents to the children, and monuments were erected to commemorate the passing of Israel over Jordan. What do you think actually took place? I have supposed it to be something like this:—Joshua, the great captain, a

man of unusual force and genius, led this wandering people, who, after forty years' hardening in the wilderness, were now become a formidable host, to the very borders of the promised land. Then they find that the way is barred, not only by the enemy, but by the river, which had overflowed its banks. Jordan, famous in history and song, they now behold for the first time. It is like a lake with a torrent tearing through the midst of it. It is no wonder that Israel called a halt upon the borders of this, as it were, unknown sea. But the great captain finds a way through. The very fact that Jordan has overflowed its banks means to him that it is fordable somewhere. He finds the place; the enthusiasm, courage, and devotion of the people would supply the rest. The great captain waits upon his God, and then turns to his people: "Here is the way through the flood; march on; let the priests that bear the ark of the Lord go through the waters and stand still on any rock that will supply them with a footing; and where they stand do you pass." And it was even as he said. As the priests that bare the ark came to the brim of the waters the host rose and followed, nothing daunted by the seeming obstacle, or by the turbid billows, or the apparent blackness and depth of Jordan. And when they that bare the ark stood in the midst, their feet upon any rock that would afford them footing, some swimming, some walking, some carrying burdens, some with little children

upon their shoulders, some leading others with their hands, the great host poured through—there was a way over Jordan.

Here is a figure of at least one experience of the man of faith—the experience that the simple trust which refuses to call halt when the Divine command is to go forward is never put to shame. God was the real Leader of Israel; the enthusiasm and self-devotion of the great captain, who laid his spell upon the mighty host, were derived from heaven. This was the way that God had marked out for Israel. The way lay through the flood, and that way Israel took at the bidding of its Leader.

There may be one point of view from which this interpretation of the text may appear to be false—namely, the point of view which regards it as having reference to the circumstances rather than to the growth of the soul. I am taking a spiritual view of my text, keeping in mind the vividness of the historical incident. But now I would wish you to strip off everything that is merely external and adventitious, local and temporary, and regard it as for all time, and as having an individual application. Fix your mind upon the principle rather than upon the particular scene. Oftentimes in history a similar feat has been attempted, with the same high enthusiasm, and has utterly failed. I think, for instance, of the Crusades, when all Europe gathered under the banner of the Cross, marched upon Jordan, essayed to cross this very river, and to attack this very

capital of Jerusalem. Europe failed where Israel succeeded. Europe set out to obtain possession of the tomb of the Saviour; popes blessed the banners; kings and princes enlisted under them; millions of lives were sacrificed, and rivers of blood were set flowing. But the tomb remains to-day, as it was then, in the possession of the Mohammedans. What Israel did on this historic day Europe at a later day failed to do. Why? Because the body of Christ was not there; it was an empty tomb they were looking for, and for the moment found, and from an empty tomb they were hurled back. God had not bidden them set out upon that quest. The difference between Israel's conquest and the defeat of the Crusaders lies in this: that, though in both cases the enthusiasm was equal, though the Cross was blessed as much as the ark of God had ever been, the Crusaders called upon God to bless what they set out to do, whereas God called upon Israel to go forward, and Israel obeyed.

Take another instance in history that comes nearer to our own time. It has been said that more mischief has been caused in the world by men who have conscientiously believed themselves to be led by God than by all other causes put together. This may or may not be true, but it has something on the face of it to justify the assertion being made. Take for instance the seventeenth century in this beloved land of ours, just before the outbreak of the great civil war. There had been eleven years of personal

government when the Stuart King asserted his right divine to govern without help from constitutional authority. I believe Charles I. was firmly convinced that he derived his commission and authority from on high—but at the cost of his life. That was a small thing: he might have been a martyr to a great idea, but that for which he stood died with him and never rose again. Still more tragic, perhaps, is the fate of one of his ministers. I never can read the life and words of Archbishop Laud without feeling for him a certain sympathy and even admiration. He was a good man, according to his light. He set out, however, to do that which Englishmen and Scotsmen will never endure—to enforce an external uniformity of religious observance. He set out to coerce the conscience, and he failed. He tried with pains and penalties, with cruelty and injustice, to enforce what he conscientiously believed to be the best thing for the Church of God in his country. "Unity," said he, "cannot much longer subsist in a church when uniformity is thrust out of the door." Most pathetic are the entries in his diary as he lies in prison awaiting the end. He had set an ideal before him, and called upon God for its accomplishment, and was surprised when it was shattered into ruin, wondered in bewilderment that he had been abandoned at the crossing of Jordan. It was because he had never been set to go that way. He tried the flood at its deep: the great captain of Israel tried it, indeed, where it had overflowed its banks, but he

knew that God had made a ford there. Where Laud failed many another has failed, not only in the Established Church, but in that for which you and I stand. There was a day in that very century when Puritan and Covenanter strove against one another; Greek met Greek that day at Dunbar. For once in his life Cromwell met his match in David Leslie, and if they two had been left alone to fight it out it is a grave question whether the Lord Protector would have returned victor to England. But the Presbyterian ministers interfered, quoting this very chapter, and perhaps my text itself. They, in counsel assembled, compelled their general to move his hosts down the hill. They said, "It is the sword of the Lord you hold in your hands; fall on and destroy the Puritan army." So Leslie, sorely against his will, moved to the attack. As Cromwell saw him coming, he shut his Bible, mounted his horse, and, rallying his army, said, "Let God arise, and let His enemies be scattered!" God could not be on both sides; so the Presbyterian ministers who were so sure of their cause were scattered in flight ere many hours were gone. We love and respect them to-day for all they did and suffered in that strenuous time, but we may learn the lesson their history teaches—that it is not always the side that calls upon God that is sure of being able to pass the flood and stand victor on the other side.

Now let us come home a little more closely with our illustrations. It has been said that one of our

national vices, and the one about which we are most sensitive, is self-righteousness. If self-righteousness is conspicuous in one person more than another, it is in the middle-class Briton, church-goer and non-church-goer. We are familiar with the type—the man who is perfectly certain that he is right, though all the world be wrong; but he has not been so perfectly sure as the saint and martyr who in dying has conquered. A man may be cross-grained, selfish, domineering, ambitious, covetous, and cruel; and yet he may whitewash all this with religion, and, using the name of God, think that obstacles will melt before him, that he will march through the flood. When we have to do with these people at close quarters—in fact, when we have been included in their ranks ourselves—how surprised we have been when the flood, instead of going away, has overwhelmed them and us! As a minister of religion, it has fallen to my lot sometimes to try to compose differences in other churches than my own. More than once, in undertaking such a difficult task, I have ere long found it impossible to succeed—not because one could not see what the matter was, but because one could not make the parties who were causing the trouble see just what it was. I have seen a man stand and sing with the air of a martyr at the stake, with almost the look of one, and yet he was the seed and the root of all the mischief—his spirit completely wrong. Standing for God, he said, and on principle—which

meant, as a rule, his own cross-grained will—and he meant to have it, and to have it all. He had come to his Jordan; Jordan would not give way. He called upon the Lord, and he raised the ark, as he thought; but he was the god enshrined in that ark, in spite of the name inscribed on his banners. To add that of Jehovah made no difference: Jordan was there, there Jordan remained; there was no passage for him.

Some of us know the man of business who justifies some exceedingly shady doing by the utterance of some such pious expression as this: "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." He has a keen sense of justice, perhaps, but he has very little sense of mercy. The man may be hard, covetous, grasping; he can shut his ears and eyes to a thousand things, so clear in his vision of the way of true business dealing. He will tell you, "No man ever heard me break my word; no man ever heard me make a promise that I did not keep. That which has given me my success is what I require from others; I stand upon simple justice and righteousness," and so on. He is not always quite sure of the foundation of the righteousness upon which he says he takes his stand. Righteousness is incomplete except its highest and final expression be love. "If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of His." Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but

he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."

I speak in pity and in sympathy to any such man as I have described. Do you know why the Crusaders failed, failed at Jordan? Do you know why Charles and Laud failed, failed when they crossed the Tweed? Do you know why you are failing? It is because you have called your own way God's way; because, deep down at the bottom of all your motives, is worship of self; because you have not seen with the larger vision what it is that lies at the end of your march. Otherwise you would not be so keen upon the things that now are, for the fashion of this world passeth away. It is not sufficient to go through life calling upon the name of the Lord; we have to be sure that we have heard the voice of the Highest saying, This is the way. The reason why men of great talent who have stood for God, as they thought, have failed is this: They have confounded God with the second best, not the best. You only find God upon the highest. If we have heard that voice Divine, it matters not that the way lies through the desert and the flood; that is the way of victory and peace. We have to define and make clear both our motives and our aims. The highest and noblest we can ever hear is the voice of God. We cannot take the right way if we have chosen it in a wrong spirit. Popes may bless banners, kings may claim Divine right, business men and church members may utter

the name of God as the justification of their own way, but Jordan cannot be passed until self has been surrendered. Any man can know when he has the mind of Christ. Such a man is led by the Spirit of God. He bears the ark of God upon his shoulders, and the waters give way before him; and not only for himself: others pass by, as it were under his shadow. We may be like the priests in the middle of the stream, standing on the rock and holding the ark high up. To see us so standing is a help to many a man to plunge into the stream and cross by himself.

> "On Jordan's stormy banks I stand,
> And cast a wistful eye
> To Canaan's fair and happy land,
> Where my possessions lie."

"On Jordan's stormy banks" the waters will give way for you: you can march to the other side in perfect safety. So that you have given yourself to your Captain and the great High Priest it is easy for you to take the way that God has marked; things are bound to go wrong if you take the way upon which God is not.

Suppose we try to put all this to ourselves, right now, as the Americans say. What are you and I living for? Are we fitted to carry the ark of God upon our shoulders? These old Covenanters that were defeated at Dunbar drew up a Catechism, which I used to learn in my early days. Perhaps it would have been well if David Leslie had held

it in his hand that historic morning and catechised the Presbyterian ministers with it. One question in that Catechism runs thus: "What is the chief end of man?"—and its answer: "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever." Thomas Carlyle says you cannot make a grander affirmation than that as the meaning and the end of your life. Let us test ourselves with it. You all have your faces turned somewhere; you are marching upon some road. Are you quite sure that the end of it is to glorify God and to enjoy Him? The will of God is ever goodwill to men. Like the great captain of Israel, we can swing our blade with confidence when it is against enemies of God; we can give the order, too, to march on, if we have previously heard it in the secret place from the lips of God.

I remember many years ago, in early Oxford days, going for a walk with a friend, some considerable distance from the university city. In a little hamlet we came across a small chapel—Wesleyan we took it to be. Entering through the open door, we found a poor old woman sweeping the floor and dusting the pews. We began to talk to her; we saw that the little chapel was part of her life; she had been in at the building of it, and she and her husband were at first paid to take care of it. But the population drifted away, the members became very few, she said. Their spirit was very beautiful; they could not afford to pay her and her

husband any longer, so she and he did the work for nothing—that is, they did it for God. The husband was called home: she was left alone. She went on with the work. "When it is too much," she said, "a neighbour gives me a helping hand. I am glad to do the work; goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life. I shall soon be over the dark river and at home; until then I serve God this way." That simple old woman was living no narrower life because she had grown poorer and poorer. There was nothing mean about her obscurity; there was something grand in its very simplicity; she had learned the deep secret, the way to master sorrow, the way to make life full and rich and glad. She was actually standing in the middle of Jordan's stream bearing the ark of God upon her shoulder, and probably it was true that many a life was the better and many a crossing the happier because she stood there.

Contrast with this another case. One Thursday there came to me in the vestry a man who had spent the greater part of his life in a district not very far from this spot. He said he had lived through a clean, straight, honourable career; he had done his best for God in his little way. But trouble came to him just at that time of life when he thought he had passed all shoals and shallows, steered safely past all rocks, and entered the harbour of old age. He was stricken in the tenderest part of his nature; the partner of his life, the one he had sworn to love

and cherish, had gone wrong—I need not state the vice. His children stood by him, but the thing he valued most was wrested from him. Home was wrong when peace was gone. He said to me, with tears in his eyes: "All Thy billows have gone over me." Had I only thought of it then, as I think of it now, I would have said: "Not unless you lie down in them; they have only gone over your feet; you are standing right in the midst of the torrent of Jordan, and you have to stand there while the waves sweep round your feet, but your children will pass over with the mighty host more easily if you will be a true, strong, and brave man. Keep true, keep your head up, and your face towards the other shore." God is not done with such a man as that: his life was not wasted, and he needed not to give way when the moment of testing came. You are the priest called to pass before the host; to you is given a position of vantage and honour. Stand in the torrent till the Captain says: "Cross," and then no man can hinder your way. I am not preaching any fair-weather Gospel; I know that good men go under, as the world counts it, but all I am desirous of making you understand is that when they go under they go up. No man who has ever suffered for right needs your pity, and he knows he does not; he would not take any other way, and is perfectly conscious of the recompense. Pass he will, and the righteous God brings him through. Just as, one by one, we leave our possessions on

this side Jordan, as they drop from us in mid-stream, one by one they are gathering on the other side. "Part of the host has crossed the flood, and part is crossing now."

I would speak a word of personal appeal.

It may be that I address some man or woman who is facing a hard thing this week, and you are tempted to compromise with evil, to bring down the banner of the Lord, ever so little it may be, to forsake that which in your heart you know to be the indubitable right. Never allow yourself to dally with the temptation even for an instant. Look to the other side; on the other side of every hard experience is a greater blessing, so you be found faithful. God is ready with His recompense; no flood will ever sweep you away. You are afraid of what has not come and never can come. On the way to what you know to be the ideal, on the way which you are certain is the way of duty, there may be a Jordan. March on; you are not the first who has crossed that flood; the great Captain and the great High Priest have gone before you. May I change the verb? It is a singular one: Our Captain and our High Priest are one and the same. Jesus went through, yet Jesus stands in our midst, and holds up the ark of the Lord. Do you remember the way that Jesus took when Jordan fronted Him? Setting His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem, He saw there only a Cross, an agony, a shame; and when loving hearts would have turned

Him aside, He repelled the temptation, for He knew whence it sprang. "Get thee behind Me!" Calvary was the Jordan of Jesus; He went bravely forward, crossed the river, and then came back and stood in the midst that we might cross under the shadow of the Cross of Calvary.

"There is a land of pure delight,
Where saints immortal reign,
Infinite day excludes the night,
And pleasures banish pain.

"Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood
Stand dressed in living green;
So to the Jews old Canaan stood,
While Jordan rolled between.

"Could we but climb where Moses stood,
And view the landscape o'er,
Not Jordan's stream, nor death's cold flood,
Should fright us from the shore."

SOME GREAT THING

"I HAD some young men in mind in preaching the sermon entitled, 'Some Great Thing.' It is an attempt to portray to themselves some characters which have in them a touch of Stoic pride. The preacher's object was to commend the worth of a humble confession of Christ—the Christ who is beyond criticism. There are some men who resent being placed under obligation even to a Redeemer. Pride is a very subtle thing, and not seldom dubs itself manliness."

VII

"And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather, then, when he saith unto thee, Wash, and be clean?"—2 KINGS v. 13.

HERE is another of these Old Testament miracles which are so puzzling to the modern, and especially to the Western, mind. I have no explanation to offer. We can but form our own judgment on the facts, and the tale is plainly told. I read it to you just now for our lesson. But there are several things to be observed concerning this class of phenomena before we make the mistake of dismissing this story as a fable.

First, the modern mind, by which I mean yours and mine, trained to believe in the uniformity of nature and the universality of law, is naturally incredulous concerning what is usually termed miracle. The ancient, and especially the Oriental, mind, was just the opposite. With us the miracle would require more justification than the prophet's message. With them, the prophet's message received its justification in the miracle. Well, now, allowing a great deal for the difference in mental attitude between the old and the new, between the East and the West, you will have to

concede that the man who wrote down this story must have believed it word for word.

Secondly, this miracle is one of an enormous class of similar phenomena which occupy the field of history and have a tendency to recur. The history of mediæval Christendom is just crammed with miracles of the same kind, and, what is more, it is exceedingly difficult—nay, it is almost impossible—to rule them out of the field of vision, and say that the men who related them, and believed that they saw them, never saw them. In modern times, take, for example, the Miracles at Lourdes or at Holywell, or, to come nearer home still, the various faith-healing cults which exist in our own land and within a few yards of this very Church. I have no wish contemptuously to rule them out of the discussion, nor have we any business to do anything of the kind. It is my belief that expectation does a great deal. Though I consider that for a time like ours, for such a life as you and I live, it may indicate childishness and even weakness of character to be always looking for the phenomenal and the thaumaturgical, yet we have no business to pour contempt upon the records of such when they come across our mental vision. As I have just said, expectation does a good deal. What we expect has a chance of coming to pass. What a good many people expect, more or less justifies the expectation. We may take it for granted that Naaman was

healed because everybody around him expected he would be, and observe, he himself was not incredulous when he declined to obey the prophet's commands. It was simply that his pride was hurt. "Dip in Jordan!" he would have said. "Abana and Pharpar are a great deal better. They are bigger rivers. If I have to wash and be clean I would rather wash at home. Besides, why could not the prophet come out? I am a very great man, yet he sends a messenger, and I thought, as I sat in my carriage, he would be sure to come out, and with a good deal of obsequiousness and deference would do some exceptional palmistry, and I should go away cured." "I thought." He had prepared himself in his mental pose for what did not take place. "Wash and be clean" was the curt message. "Go to Jordan," and Naaman did not like it.

Thirdly, after the considerations just advanced, I think you and I will be prepared to readjust our mental attitude to the problem of the relation of mind to matter, and the subjection of the latter to the former. I will ask you, therefore, to-night, to pass this miracle without further discussion. You may take it just as it stands. "There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy."

But it is the psychology of the series of incidents here recorded with which we are most concerned. How true they are to human nature, and how close the parallel between Naaman and ourselves. Here

is a man stricken with leprosy, and at the same time eaten up with pride. If he had been asked to do some great thing, he, soldier that he was and master of legions, would instantly have done it. A mighty man, he expected to be asked to perform a mighty feat. When the prophet said, "Go to this Judean stream, get out of your carriage, stoop down and wash and be clean," he went away in a rage.

Human nature, which is capable of much grandeur of achievement in great things, in special things, often breaks down in the presence of small things. So it was with Naaman. So, too often, it is with us. There are men here to-night, I am perfectly sure, who are cavilling in the presence of the claims of Christ, and they think it is because they themselves are superior to the claim. They suppose it is because they have a greater, a more austere, ideal than the preacher has to set before them, whereas all the time they are simply acting in the spirit of Naaman, and do not know that what they count a great thing is not the thing that is asked of them at all, but some harder thing which is not usually called great. God does the great things, and does not need humanity to help Him. I have in the pulpit with me a letter from a young man who read somewhere a sermon that was preached here, presumably to young men, on a Sunday evening a few weeks ago. Writing in the name of three or four others, he says: I think I will not read the letter, but sum it up in a few words:—

"We have been reading together the life of the great Stoic Emperor Marcus Aurelius, and to tell you the truth we feel that this man's life was a higher and a nobler one than that of most Christians, certainly a better life than ours. We wish we could attain to his ideal, and it is in no carping spirit that I ask you, Would it not be better for some of us to live as well as Marcus Aurelius and make less profession of Christianity? and could not we do as well if we were as true as he to the ideal set before us, without professing Christianity at all?"

I have not sent any reply. I am going to speak it now, because I think there is probably more than one young man present who could have written that letter, and who certainly has that problem. Marcus Aurelius represented the later Stoicism of the Roman Empire, and I grant you that he was about the finest example of it that was ever produced, at any rate so far as is known. I will grant further that Marcus Aurelius, and all that he stood for, is more admirable than a good deal of Christianity in some of its modern developments as we see it around us to-day. The late Mr Lecky compared it favourably with some of the third century developments of Christianity — with their asceticism, intolerance, fierceness of spirit, and almost brutality of living.

Well, now, it is not easy to see at first sight why Marcus Aurelius should not be your ideal instead of the Christian one. Any modern Marcus who has his duty before him cannot but be a man to be respected, but I will point out something you may never have thought of. As a rule, in this self-sufficient type of life, there is something vicious at the very base. It

was not so with Marcus, but it was so with his philosophy. Stoicism was indigenous to the Roman Empire. The Empire was the expression of its philosophy. It was one that made strong men but austere, and hard and proud. As a rule, Stoicism, as it was commonly understood, exhibited nothing of the virtue of humility, very little of sympathy. It was a Stoic who wrote:—

> "'Tis sweet when tempests roar upon the sea
> To watch from land another's deep distress,
> Not that his sorrow makes our happiness,
> But that some sweetness there must ever be,
> Watching what sorrows we do not possess."

You have only to think of the burning heart of St Paul uttering himself Godward for the sake of his kindred, and willing that he himself might be a castaway if so be that they might be saved, and then to put beside him the very best that Stoicism ever produced, to see that in its noble dignity it came something short of that sublime self-abnegation. What was there in St Paul that Stoicism never possessed? I will tell you. It was strength blended with humility and with spiritual sympathy. He went deeper down, and he rose higher up than Stoicism was ever capable of doing.

I say this without trying to show how worthless the Roman philosophy was—quite the reverse. It was a great philosophy. It did a great work in the world. But the sun will put out the fire although there is fire in the sun. Jesus makes Aurelius un-

necessary. And I will venture to think that if ever Jesus and Aurelius had met face to face, if Aurelius had ever entered into the spirit of the Christians that he through a sense of duty persecuted, there would have been a Christian Emperor long before Constantine. He was not far from the kingdom of God.

History shows us a few such spectacles. Sir Matthew Hale, for instance, sat on the bench when Bunyan's wife came to plead for her husband. The humble-minded judge did not understand, he could not see that he was dealing with a hero in that poor Bedford tinker who was imprisoned for conscience' sake. Someone has written very beautifully, "The judge and the prisoner have met in heaven by now and understand each other better." Not far apart in spirit were they even then.

Of course you feel that these great souls such as Marcus Aurelius, who has been quoted, were not very far from Jesus; but you have only to bring Jesus into their company to see that you need not follow Aurelius nor make him an ideal, for his ideal is absorbed and illuminated by the presence of the Son of God.

There is a good deal of the Stoic temper about to-day. When you look back upon Stoicism you are doing a very different thing from living in the midst of it. It might have been a good thing then for a man to live as Aurelius, but now you cannot look back upon the line of history without seeing Jesus

standing in the path. Are you going to pass Him to reach the side of Aurelius? You need never do it. All you want and all he ever wanted, noble man, was just to understand what Jesus asked, and the type and standard for which Jesus lived. More than that, Jesus is not simply an example. He is a dynamic of the very character that we commend in Aurelius himself. The sun puts out the fire, but it first kindled it, and it only puts it out when the brightness of the shining and the warmth of the heat it gives makes the fire necessary no longer.

I was told at luncheon to-day of a medical man, typical of a great many men like you, who was asked to come down to the City Temple and listen to the preacher. He has no objection whatever to the preacher, but he declined. His reason was this —"I do not need it. I am trying now to live an honourable and upright life. I am doing what I can to help my fellows, to lessen the total of suffering in the world." You will believe me at once, I am sure, when I say that for a man like that I feel a considerable amount of respect, and if it were only a question of coming and hearing the preacher I should dismiss at once all thought of objecting to his contention. This self-respecting man with a moral ideal resembles very greatly the Stoic. But he misses something. He does not see that it is not the preacher he seeks in the house of God, it is the something for which the preacher stands. He does not see that the person he is rejecting is not the preacher, and the

preacher's counsel has the sanction of his own moral ideal. Why does he not penetrate behind the why and the wherefore of the very life he himself seeks to live? In all charity—and my words are impersonal—you will allow me to give the reason. It is because of "The Great Thing." He prefers to do it rather than to have it done for him. And, mind you, in every character where that is the prevailing mood and governs the life there is something short of the highest. In history grand things have been done by men who could not stoop, and just because they could not stoop missed the best and highest of all. It was a great day when a message was sent from Paris in the incipient stage of the Revolution to the city of Marseilles, "Send us six hundred men who know how to die." They found them on the instant, and from the march of the six hundred men upon Paris the history of Europe has been changed. The "Marseillaise" was sung for the first time.

It was a great day in the history of the world—though England was playing then a less noble part—when a young American in the grip of the English soldiers wrote "The Star-Spangled Banner," with shot and shell flying over his head, but a great enthusiasm, a noble and unselfish patriotism in his heart. He would have dared and done anything. It was a great thing to write that song, and he wrote it there.

It was a great day in the history of humanity when Cromwell sat on his horse on the shores of

Dunbar and lifted up his voice, along with his invincible Ironsides, and sang "Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered." It was a great thing nobly done. But he did some more things in his life equally great that were not so conspicuous, and one of the sweetest of all was his dying prayer, a prayer not first and foremost of strength, but of humility. "Lord, bless Thy people. Thou hast made me the means of doing them some good and Thee service. Pardon those who would trample upon the dust of a poor worm, and give us a good night, for Jesus' sake." That man could stoop as well as rise, and that is why his sweep through the firmament of history is so magnificent as it is. He could do a great thing, but he did not despise the day of small things. Nay, he was willing that the greatest thing should be done for him—he stooped low at the Cross of Christ.

Now, my young hearers, if I were to call you to some great deed of heroism, would you not respond? (Pardon me for suggesting that I, too, may venture to-night to stand in the place of the prophet of God.) I know you would—that spirit is not dead. There are many people who think that chivalry and idealism have passed out of English life. Nothing of the sort! If I were to ask for volunteers for a forlorn hope by to-morrow, and you knew they were needed, we should get them. I remember watching at Bloemfontein the taking of the Waterworks, when for the moment the supply had been cut off

by the Boers. It was a terrible sight, though, after all, there was not much to see, but only what it suggested. Common, ordinary men, such as you and I meet in the street any day, were marching up that hill of death line by line, with no perturbation, no undue haste. Slowly, deliberately, heroically, the British soldiers moved to the summit of the hill that was held by the hidden foe, taking cover where they could, but rising in the open when they must. They just did it. It was called for. It was duty. Those same men would drink and swear on Sunday night in the public-houses in London. We know them. They were capable of the great thing when it was called for. You never dreamed as you met them that there was the hero in them, but it was there, just as surely as it is in you.

We read every day of some story of heroism in the manning of the lifeboat, in the saving of comrades from the explosion in the coal mine, and we know the men who do it, poor material, too, but capable of a great thing. And if to-morrow our country were in extremity, if we saw men in peril, and it meant the giving up of life in the attempt to rescue them, and we called for men to do it, they would come. I would guarantee to gather out of this church a devoted band who could do the great thing.

Yes, you can do all this, but there are some things you cannot or will not do. Why is it that so many manly fellows will have nothing to do with religion,

are afraid to confess God—nay, more, are still less willing to confess Christ than they are to name God? God is only real to you in Christ, but I have noticed this, though I am not always able to account for it, that the word "God" may come to a man's lips where he feels a great delicacy and reluctance about the utterance of the word "Christ." Why? Because somehow the utterance of the latter means a certain amount of self-committal. If a man names Christ with reverence and a touch of simplicity and tenderness, it is implied that he belongs to Him. You might storm a height at the cannon's mouth, but you do not care for the shame and ridicule that might come from the charge of inconsistency or of weakness. You give all sorts of reasons for your abstention, and you think them true. Suppose we examine some of them.

I know you in your business house. You are straight enough. Up to a certain point your standard is as clear and honourable as that of the medical man I have just named. But you know as well as I do that standard only holds good up to a point. It would be a great deal easier to stand with Aurelius than with Christ. All the moral dignity and the strength and the suggestion, all the self-respect that heightens into pride, is easy. That is as simple as drawing your breath. You would be ashamed of telling a lie for instance—it is easy to tell the truth and shame the devil. You will not stoop to lie. I will tell you what you will not stoop

to, either. You will not stoop to a confession of need. You are prepared for the great thing. There is still a greater, only it does not seem greater, because you come down to it instead of up, and that is where you do not want to go. Do you understand what the sentiment means of

"Thus looking within and around me, I ever renew
(With that stoop of the soul which in bending upraises it too)
The submission of Man's nothing-perfect to God's All-Complete,
As by each new obeisance in spirit, I climb to his feet!"

Listen to this man's reason for not joining himself to Christ. "Oh," he says, "I can live a good life without your Christ. I am trying to do it. Do not ask me for professions which I cannot keep. There is no need for them." Is there not? "You can live a good life without Christ." Do you not detect the pride in the statement? Do you see what it means? It is the thrusting back upon self, as it were, the entire responsibility for life. You will get broken at that business, young man, before you have gone very far. If not Christ, then somebody else for a helping hand—it has been tried before and has been as big a failure as you are making it. You can manage without Christ in the living of the right life? Let us examine the life and see. There you have a record of it moment by moment, fact by fact, across the whole consciousness of humanity. Impossible! for you know quite well you have failed before the ideal time and again. You cannot live your life, your right life, without faith in some thing

or in some one, and before the days have gone much further you will find yourself longing and yearning for a stronger hand than yours to save your manhood. Oh, you can live it, if you will stop short. But Aurelius' standard will not do. There is something more austere and exacting still, where you will not be required to do the great thing. It will be done for you. Can you stoop to it and rise? If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing wouldest thou not have done it? How much more, then, when he asks thee to leave thy burden in the hands of the strong One, the Eternal, the "Saviour, Redeemer, and Friend."

Here is another. "Christians," he says, in self-justification, "are no better than other people." Leave Christians alone. To your own Master you stand or fall. I know all about the weakness and the waywardness of Christians. It is not too much to say that Christians have given me, for instance, a worse time than other people have. But you have nothing to do with them. When you stand before the throne on the great day—and it is coming, this great day of discovery—you will not be asked how John Smith or Tom Jones lived. You will be asked whether you followed and obeyed and lived to the ideal that was given to you. If you have seen the Highest, cleave to it, for be sure the highest will be required of you. You need not be ashamed of being found in the company of Christ. You are only asked to confess your need of Him.

Once upon a time a man in some such mood as yours drew to that same Lord as He stood, a seeming peasant, upon the roadway in Galilee, and kneeled down at His feet, and this is how He prayed—"Good Master"—that is just what you are saying, you go so far as that, anybody, and pay Him a compliment —"Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" He was perfectly sincere, so are you. His life did not satisfy him, he wanted a better—just like you. And the Master's reply was nothing doctrinal, very simple, "Thou knowest the commandments, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother." The answer came, "Master, all these I have kept from my youth up." The Master knew him, and, speaking straight to the deepest in him, said, "One thing thou lackest. Go and sell everything you possess and give it to the poor, and follow Me." There was one thing he would not do. He did the grand thing of falling down in the street—it meant a good deal to do that. But when the Master said, "Give your all," he was not prepared for that. I have known a man honest enough to say that in my time. "I have some things I do not feel willing to give up. Christ cannot have them, so I cannot have Christ." But for one such man there are ten thousand who will not acknowledge the real reason for "staying away." It is that they are prepared for the great thing, but not for the lesser, which nobody sees. And the great thing in your case may be just

what you are doing and doing with a worthy manhood. But there is something else required, and it may be nothing but a giving up. You are no hero if you can only be a hero by a spurt and with the band playing, as it were. You are a hero if you are prepared to go down as well as to go up, to give to Christ all that you have and are, as well as to do something conspicuously brave and sublime in His service under the gaze of men. If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, I know it would have been done. How, then, when he asks thee to come to the Cross and leave everything there and yield heart and mind and soul into the keeping of Him, and Him only Who is really strong.

There is a heroism which is as great as any I have seen. Look at the heroism of John Wesley! He learned something between two periods in his life, the former when he was going out to America as a young man. When the storm came he screamed and trembled. He was like a woman—I withdraw that word—he was in terror of the elements. Some of the sailors laughed at him, for they were men who could face the great thing, he was not. They would have gone down into the great deep if necessary, the heroes that they were. Wesley, the Christian, was not. But he saw something that filled him with awe, a little group of men and women, Moravian Christians, standing and singing, singing in the midst of the tempest, as near to God by sea as they were by land, and altering their

demeanour no whit for the presence of the storm. Wesley felt there was something missing in him, and he learned, and the time came when that same man was gripped by a murderous crowd and led to what seemed certain death. All through one memorable night Wesley, the preacher, who only sought their good, was being hurried hither and thither, now to be drowned, now to be stoned, now to be hanged, as the mood of the mob changed. He was none of them, but it would not have mattered —he was ready. His own account of it was this— he was just as quiet and just as undemonstrative when he was the obscure person whom England would not have said very much about it if he had been murdered, as he was in the great assembly when he stood face to face with thousands and tens of thousands of listening hearers—just the same man in the moment of sublime victory, and the same man prepared to face ignominy and shame and death. What made the difference? Why, Wesley had found the real Christ, and the real Christ made a hero as great as any Aurelius of them all, a hero, too, who could show himself such on all occasions, and a hero whose dignity was present, not in hardness in the time of such conflict as I have described, such thrilling danger, but in sweetness and in sympathy and in love. He would have knelt and prayed for these same murderers, and would have counted it a glorious thing if he had been destroyed for their sakes, if they had been gathered into the kingdom.

It is to such a character as that I am calling you, and to such an ideal as that I summon you. It is a great thing, only the world does not always count it such. If you will expect some great thing, it will be by taking a greater thing from Christ Himself. He will make you capable of it. You will be glad to owe it to Him. You will go back to your business to-morrow prepared for scorn, you will go back to be taunted, if need be, with something you feel conscience requires you to do or to leave undone, and you will defy the conventions of society. Many would rush to the point of the bayonet who would not do that. The great want of the present hour is moral grit. Dare to live your true life. Let no man interfere with you in your relations with your God. And if you know a thing to be true and feel it to be demanded of you and see it to be the highest that has ever crossed your path, and you feel your urgent need of the clasp of the Lord Divine, why, my brother, surrender! It will be the grandest thing you ever did in your life, far more so than following the petty ideals which now satisfy you. If the prophet asked for some great thing, he would get it from you. The forgiveness of sin, the strengthening of manhood for the battle with the tempter, all are from Him Who is really the source of good in every man, whether he acknowledges Him or not, "that in all things He might have the pre-eminence" He deserves. "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, and He shall lift you up." "If any man

willeth to do the will of My Father which is in heaven, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God or whether I speak of Myself." "For whoso loveth his life shall lose it; but whoso loseth his life for My sake shall keep it unto life eternal."

ETERNAL PUNISHMENT AND ETERNAL LIFE

This sermon was asked for by some of the younger members of the congregation. It gave rise to some questioning on the part of those at whose request the text had been chosen. As a result of this questioning a further aspect of the subject was treated some weeks later, and entitled the Law of Retribution. The supreme difficulty of those who correspond with me upon these sermons appears to have been the content of the word Eternal. Some have understood me to teach that all sin revenges itself in an everlasting sequence without hope of remedy, while others, oddly enough, have understood me to mean that sin is punished in this life and in this life alone. I need hardly point out to readers of these two sermons that in my view of this great and solemn subject there is no possibility of avoiding what is commonly termed the punishment of sin. But punishment has a merciful purpose, and repentance, which shrinks not to accept the consequences of sin, secures in the divine order their certain transformation into good. Eternal life is expressed in kind, not in duration, and every true follower of Christ is in possession of it now.

VIII

"These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal."—St Matthew xxv. 46.

To-night I wish to teach rather than exhort, or to exhort only by the teaching and its implications. This text is a most solemn and important utterance of our Lord, and we have no reason to doubt that the parable in which it appears is given to us substantially as it came from Him. But you may have observed for yourselves that the words of the text do not appear in the Revised Version of the New Testament precisely as they appear in the Authorised, and the change is not unimportant. The Authorised Version reads, as you have already heard, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal." Now the word which is translated "everlasting" in the former part of the text is precisely the word which is translated "eternal" in the latter part. Therefore the revisers of the New Testament have given us the sentence thus:—"These shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life." The word "everlasting" represents the received theology of the seventeenth century, when the Authorised Version of the Bible, as we have it, and in many

ways the more admirable version, was first promulgated. The word "eternal," however, which takes its place in the Revised Version, is so much truer to what I feel our Lord's meaning must have been that I would like to dwell upon what I take to be its content for a few moments.

Any Greek, or any person accustomed to speak Greek amongst those who first heard our Lord make use of this word, would be in no doubt as to its meaning. Perhaps our Lord did speak in Greek. Greek was well understood throughout the whole region in which His teaching was given. It was what French became a little while ago to modern Europe, the language of common intercourse as between people who spoke various and little understood dialects. Perhaps He did not speak in Greek. He may have spoken in Aramaic. If so, you may be perfectly sure that the word which is rendered by this Greek term "eternal" was one which in our Lord's mind bore exactly the same meaning.

Now, what does "eternal" mean? I will give you one of its meanings first, which I may call its lesser meaning, and which though not necessarily contradicting the larger meaning, certainly limits it. It may mean "age-long." The word "eternal" is αἰώνιος and it has for its root αἰών "an age," or a vague period of time. What our Lord may have meant to say here is, "These shall go away into age-long punishment," not specifying how long, "and the righteous into age-long life."

But as you see, and it is often pointed out, this interpretation of the term logically carries with it this conclusion, that as the punishment of the wicked is not necessarily endless but age-long, so the bliss of the righteous is not endless either. We feel at once, then, that our Lord could not be speaking in such indefinite language as to hold out a sort of limited hope to those who lived worthily and righteously in this world. It is not age-long life that He promises. It is something vaster, nobler than that.

Well, then, we will put aside that one meaning. As I have said, it does not necessarily contradict what I am now going to tell you, but it certainly limits it. The word "eternal," however, as used in the Greek language, may mean—often does mean—that which is outside of, and above, and transcends, and supersedes time. Or we will put it in another way, the eternal is the real, as opposed to the seeming. Please bear that in mind while we are going a little further in our examination of the text. The way in which many understand this text, even those who do not believe it, is that "eternal" is equivalent to "everlasting." Let me give you an illustration. I was reading only last night, in a paper which appears week by week—I may as well name it, I have named it before, it is called *T. P.'s Weekly*—a little chapter of autobiography in which the well-known journalist whose name is given to the paper, describes his own

childhood. Mr T. P. O'Connor says, that one of the ideas which came home to his imagination most forcibly when a boy, was that of eternity, and it was because at the school which he attended, and which I take to have been a Roman Catholic school, there were certain seasons when the boys were required to abstain from play, from the usual indulgences of boyhood, and betake themselves to meditation and devotion. Amongst the books which Mr O'Connor then read was one which he said brought home to him with the utmost force the idea of eternity. This, he says, is the way it was taught. Speaking of the fate of the impenitent, the writer of the little devotional manual went on to say—Supposing at the end of a million years of torment, a soul who had been condemned to everlasting punishment were to raise himself from his agony and ask what time it was, the answer would be "It is eternity." At the end of another million years suppose the same soul again to raise his suffering eyes and ask what time it was, the answer would come just the same—"Eternity, and eternity is only beginning." To an imaginative boy such as Mr O'Connor must have been, I can well understand with what pungency the content of eternity as thus presented must have come home to him. But it is an awful thing to think of eternity in that way. If Mr O'Connor were as learned in the history of thought as he certainly is master of letters he would know that to a Greek that was not eternity, but it

is quite true of his mediæval theology—and there was not a pin to choose in that respect between Romanism and Calvinism; we have not escaped it to-day; it is still in our midst, and my solemn purpose to-night is to address you who have ceased to believe it and have not known what to put in its place. I was passing the other day by a great expanse of advertising wall, and I saw on it in large letters, put there by some zealous follower of Christ, "Where will you spend Eternity?" and mentally I instantly amended the phrase to myself, "How am I spending eternity?" We have a way of thinking of eternity as coming by and by, that it will be endless time. Believe me, my brethren, eternity is not coming; it is here, it is now. We are speaking as if we had something to wait and to watch for. "Where will you spend eternity?" But the thought which has most authority with conscience ought to be this, "What am I doing in eternity? How am I using the eternal now?"

For brethren—here I beg that you will give me your patient attention for a moment—there is really no such thing as time. The eternal is the only real. You cannot put a bound to time at either end. Follow history back as far as it will go till it is lost in the dim regions of antiquity, and ask what lies beyond at that end. Endless time; in a word, infinity of days. And follow through the hours when your life ends, until history ends, too, at the other end. Can you put a bound to time there, and

what is the term? There is no term. Time is endless. There again is infinity of days. Pluck out of the midst of it your twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years of life, and how much is left of the grand total? Precisely what there was before you began counting, infinity of days. The moment you try to grasp this thought it eludes you. Yet there is no escape from the conclusion that there is no time, there is only eternity. I cannot mark eternity off in days, and weeks, and months, and years, and centuries, because it is only God's unchanging now.

The fact is, time, like space, is a sort of limitation imposed on thought. I say like space. Let me illustrate again. I look towards the west wall of the building wherein I am speaking. What lies beyond that barrier? Space. And beyond it? Yet again space. And what beyond that? Imagination can carry you no further—infinity. At this end infinity too, so west, north, and south, there is no boundary to that whereon you stand. Hold firmly for a moment to the thought. If I could lift you and the Church and all that appeals to our senses here, out of the midst of this infinity, how much would be left? Just as much as there was before. You can take no section of the infinite. All that we are compelled to say concerning this fact, which is a fact, and an unescapable fact too, is, space does not exist. I am compelled to think in its categories just as I am compelled to think in the categories of time, but neither of them really is. Neither time

nor space, but only eternity and the infinite are true.

Now, brethren, if you have followed me in my philosophising so far—every one of us is an embryo philosopher—may I ask you to look again at our text. The temporal is that within which we are limited. The conception of everlasting, even, is an instance of that limitation. We speak of eternity as time added to time added to time added to time *ad infinitum.* It is impossible. There is no such thing. The time element must come out. The fact that we are conscious of it is simply a proof of our limitation. Why we should be thus limited we do not fully know, but sometimes I think I see glimpses of the reason. It is that we may know against the dark background of evil the meaning of the good. We may not know very much about the mystery of life, but we know just enough to find a right way through it. The man who is living for what he feels to be highest, for what he knows to be the right, has it always written with unmistakable plainness within him. That man knows that he is moving towards escape from his limitation. By every good act or thought we rise above our limitation, as it were, and come into immediate relationship with the life which never changes, which is the life of God, and thus we are prepared a little for an understanding of our Lord's strange words in the seventeenth of St John: "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent."

By implication, what are we to say, then, is the absence of this? Can I find a better word than punishment? Punishment is limitation accepted, punishment is the placing of the soul in a prison-house, punishment is to dwell in the eternal without seeing that it is eternal, punishment is to be content with the material, though the material may bring pain to the soul. Punishment, in a word, is prison, liberty is eternal life. Every evil thought or deed is limitation accepted. Death will not free you, for death itself is only an incident in eternity.

"As the tree falls, so must it lie;
As a man lives, so shall he die."

Now I trust I have shown you something of what eternity really means. It is God's now. The introductory words of our parable show that this is so. "When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit on the throne of His glory, and before Him shall be gathered all the nations." When? Now. You are not waiting for the judgment, it is going on. You are before the judgment seat of Christ at this moment. All your thoughts are read in the light of the eternal. God makes no mistakes. The mercy of Christ is such that it will not spare.

It is impossible not to believe in eternal punishment. Every act, every thought of evil draws to itself its own inevitable result. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth,

that shall he also reap." We are not waiting for eternity to have the balance put right. Men may feel that they have dodged God, as it were. They have not. Some of us who have been trying to live righteously feel as though it were well with the unrighteous. It never is. Inevitably, here or on the other side of death, wrong living works itself out in tragedy. There is no tragedy so dreadful as that of the soul which has sinned against itself. What is punishment but the imprisonment of the soul in its own wickedness? Retribution is absolutely inevitable and unescapable. Some of you talk as though it were never so. I have heard it said that the moment you eliminate the time element from the thought of eternity you have taken away its dread. It is the exact opposite with me. The moment I take the time element out it seems as if eternity is crashing upon me. I feel as though it were impossible to doubt that the lash descends, the punishment comes, the prison door is closed upon the soul. You told a lie, that lie has turned to rend you, has shut you under its own baleful influence. You turned from the pathway of right towards sensual self-indulgence, and lo! you become a prisoner of your flesh, and of the flesh see corruption. You do harm to another, and by and by the harm comes back again to you with compound interest. "He that speakest against Me wrongeth his own soul." Men talk about eternity as though they could afford to wait for it and will be prepared for

God's judgments when they come. They know very little of the real meaning of the judgment. Here and now, with resistless force—for God cannot be cajoled—descends the penalty of a sinful life.

Some of you are living as it were like a man sleeping in the topmost storey of a burning house and telling himself that there is no danger until the fire reaches that floor. The foundations are gone. So it is with evil life. The man who lives falsely is already undermined by the judgments of God. It is punishment to be shut off from eternal life and beauty, joy, love. Death itself can give him no rescue. It simply takes the bad man, as it were, from one prison-house to another, and gives him on the way a glimpse of the blue sky above and the fresh sweet air in the midst of which he might live and ought to have lived. All punishment is eternal. All true living is eternal. God's eternal now is the one thing from which the bad man cannot escape and the good man does not want to escape.

There is nothing like illustration. May I close my sermon with one? Suppose we had before us here two rich men. I have no sympathy with the cant which speaks as though it were an absurd idea for a man to dream of being rich. Wealth is power. All power may be used for good. But there is a point beyond which no man can strive for money without perilling his soul, and I will show you what I mean. We have heard of a millionaire

—he shall be nameless for the moment—who spent his life in amassing money by every means in his power. He had no scruples as to the way in which he obtained it. He would rob on a large scale or a small. Conscience appeared to be dead. He was only a scourge to the community in the land in which he lived. In the end, one day, in a drunken delirium, he leapt overboard and the ocean swallowed him. Does anybody feel that there was no tragedy in an end like that? I do not say it was inevitable. That man might have lived a cool, calculating, hardened ruffian, steeled against the opinion of the world. Would he have escaped tragedy? I trow not. He might have waited till the last dread hour when the summons came which no man can refuse to obey, and then he would see that his guilty gold had built a prison-house around his shrivelled soul, and out of that prison-house he could find no means of escape.

Some theologians would say eternity would be the beginning of his self-discovery. Eternity—eternity is here. Death may have been the beginning of his self-discovery of his misuse of eternity, and the penalty descends upon him who had gained all he sought to gain, but in the gaining had lost his soul.

But here is another man, and I do not shrink from naming him. We will say a Samuel Morley stands before us. God has blessed this man with this world's goods and abundance of them. But

what use does he make of them? How many souls have been lifted nearer God for the helping hand and the power of Samuel Morley? How many lives have been sweeter, how much corruption has been swept away, who can tell? Wealth could not build a prison-house around that man's soul. It rather furnished him with wings to fly. Poor men, do not mistake me. God has given you your opportunities, too. They are not the same as Samuel Morley's. Making friends of the Mammon of unrighteousness is a perilous thing to do, and without it you may enter into the eternal habitations.

Let me give you another figure. Here is a young *roué* who has brought down his father's grey hairs in sorrow to the grave. Many a worthy man has an unworthy son, and of all unsolved problems I think the problem of an evil succession to a noble example, a bad son to a good father, is one of the greatest. This lad has broken the heart of the nearest and dearest. He has had every indulgence that money could buy, every opportunity that human affection could give, all to no purpose. Those who loved him had simply furnished him with the means to destroy himself. A sort of sinister devil seems to possess him. He knows the anguish he has caused, and some day, when he has run his course and has no more to hope for from boon companions in this life, when all the means that were once at his disposal for the ruin of himself and others are squandered, when he, as a derelict on the ocean of

life comes to himself, young men, that *roué* must be suffering the tortures of the damned. He is not waiting for some hell of a million years; he has a hell of to-day, he has the horror of this night, he has the feeling of tragic failure. He knows himself in the grip of a demon whom he cannot shake off. He has exchanged heaven for hell, and love for hate. What sort of punishment do you call that? I call it the punishment of God's unchanging now. As he has sown, so he has reaped. The penalty did not wait. It descended upon him with the first sin. The second was easier because of that. The sequence you now see.

Here is yet another, quite different from either of these two, a man present, perhaps, in the congregation. A Christian? Oh, no, nothing so weak and so childish as that! This man is superior to all the ordinary sanctions of that curious snivelling creature called a Christian—is a man of the world. He is as hard as a flint. He does not stand very high in the opinion of mankind, but you cannot describe him as a failure. No man can get inside the joints of his armour. He knows well how to defend himself. Do not appeal to this man for pity. Do not appeal to his better self. He seems to have none. It was not always so. He had once. Mark the dread law. That man has stifled every good impulse. Meaning to get on in life he has trampled under foot all that he formerly held to be noble. All his squeamishness has left

him. He no longer has scruples. When he wants a thing he gets it; if he feels he would like to do a thing he does not stop to measure whether in the judgment of the eternal it is good or bad. He is too hard. What can you expect from this man? No Gospel will ever find entry through his sheet armour. All I can say is that the inevitable moment is coming when the cumulative penalty of the way he has been living will come home to him. He may be too insensible ever to know what it means on this side of death. You go hoping that at the deathbed of the wicked you may see a belated repentance. Nothing of the kind. Ten to one he will die as callous as he lives. But then? But then? The poor shrivelled soul will pass into the presence of his Maker, but not into liberty, not to gladness, only to disillusion and the outer darkness, one prison-house exchanged for another. You would not change with him now. He is in prison and does not see it, but you see it and you do not want to go where he is, where he lives, even now. He has trifled with eternity here, and now eternity is avenging itself upon him. He is shut away from God, and the worm that dieth not is busy with him—remorse, self-loathing, the conscience is tortured with the thought of forfeited possibility and the long, long night that lies between him and righteousness again. How much more, who shall say, but all this is said by our Lord in this figure of the Last Judgment. It is not the judgment that

has been waiting. That man was a prisoner long ago, but he did not know it. The hour comes when he does know it, and then he feels what was true before, the punishment eternal is upon him.

Will you compare with these depressing and sinister examples another I will give you? I could choose if I liked some suffering saint with whom suffering seems to be limitation in this world, and nothing is liberty and little joy. But I will not. I will choose just some ordinary man out of this congregation and make his experience speak. Here is a business man in a small way, just an ordinary man, a hundred of whom you will meet in the course of a hundred yards to-morrow on your way to the city. This man is trying to do right, to live the straight life, to keep near to God. He feels there is a God to serve, a God who is one of righteousness and love. That man has not been prosperous in the world. Do you think he has made a bad investment? If you could get that man to stand up and speak to you, he would say that if he had his time to come over again and his sacrifice to make, for the sake of the right and the true he would make it over again. There is a blessing now. There is a voice that speaks within. There is an experience of which nobody can rob him. He knows what that is. This is life eternal, that this man's eyes are fixed upon God. He has risen above his prison-house. The world may refuse him his rewards, but with God he already is in spirit at one, and this is

life eternal. Moreover, there is a day coming to him when he who now sees as through a glass darkly shall see face to face, when the last barrier falls down, when the last veil is removed. O glorious liberty of the children of God! "His righteousness shall shine forth as the noonday in the Kingdom of the Father."

Mark our Lord's solemn teaching concerning the great Revelation to come. It is not the number of propositions you could repeat about God; it is the way you have lived. I have been astonished sometimes to reflect how it is that the theologians so often miss the point of this parable. What is it all about? Some of the people who were most astonished when they heard the Master's "Come, ye blessed of My Father," were those who did not know they had been standing in the forefront of the battle, and did not know they had been on the watchtowers waiting for the coming of the morning. I will tell you what they did know. They knew what it was to live nobly, and they triumphed. There are some men before me doing that now. Well, my brother, I want to speak to you one word of revelation from the heart of the Most High. You are on the right way. I beseech you to see all that lies before you in so far as God means you to see. And there is one thing I think He means you to see, and that is that the smile of the Father is yours, that the presence of the Saviour divine is with you all the days, that you have never won a

victory yet in a strength that was your own and yours alone, and when you have seemed least supported as it has seemed to you and to the world, all the omnipotence of the Eternal has been behind you, and all the glory of the Father has been shining upon you. Simple faith would lift you higher than you have ever been. Trust God. Righteousness and love are behind all, after all, and best of all. When the scales fall away, oh, the expansion of revelation! This is life eternal.

I remember once speaking to a friend of mine[1] in Brighton who, giving me his experience of his own childhood, said, "I can remember when my mother cried as she cut the bread for our breakfast, keeping none back for herself, for it was the last crust that she was dividing. I, the eldest born, inquired the reason why this was done. It has kept me straight in the world ever since under terrible temptation. She said, 'My lad, your father has been dismissed from his situation because he would not lie, and we have come to the last loaf, but I am proud of your father, and you must grow up like him too.'" "And," said my friend, for he is a friend in a very humble position, "I have tried to do it. The example of that great sacrifice is before me, that solemn and sad morning when it seemed as if we had come to the last, and God let us go through and remained silent. But it was not the last. Somehow I felt that morning

[1] This man is also referred to on p. 197.

as if I stood higher, I was so proud of my father's manhood, and to-day as I look back and remember that we did come through many a hardship, it is true, but we have come through. I would not barter our faith, our quietness of heart, the mutual love and respect of our home circle for all that the world could give, if we had to leave those things outside."

What shall I call that? This is true life, is it not? When we get to heaven we do not expect to find another sort, we expect to find that. That kind of manhood in upon the throne of the universe. It went there by the Cross of Calvary. This is life indeed, and this is life eternal.

I can imagine someone asking me, "How am I to get into this eternal life, for it seems as if sin closes me round and the world is too much for me, temptation too strong, and I cannot escape. You threaten, but you cannot save." You remind me of some people I have heard about. One of them came and kneeled down in the streets one day to one whom he took to be a Galilean peasant whose vision he felt was greater than his own, and this is what he said, "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" The man saw something better than he had ever seen before. "Lord, to whom shall we go?" said a poor fisherman, "Thou hast the words of eternal life." So we will go with the young ruler and with Peter the fisherman and we will kneel down at the

same feet and we will remember that that life, that noble life of Christ, that stainless life can never die. He is not only living now, He is living in your very midst if you only knew it. His is the true life, the ageless life, the deathless life, eternal life. "I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly."

"O! how shall I whose native sphere
Is dark, whose mind is dim,
Before the Ineffable appear,
And on my naked spirit bear
The uncreated beam?

"There is a way for man to rise
To that sublime abode:—
An offering and a sacrifice,
A Holy Spirit's energies,
An Advocate with God:—

"These, these prepare us for the sight
Of Holiness above;
The sons of ignorance and night
May dwell in the Eternal Light
Through the Eternal Love!"

THE LAW OF RETRIBUTION

See Preface to preceding sermon.

IX

"If thy hand cause thee to offend, cut it off; it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."—St Mark ix. 43, 44.

Some time ago, when preaching from the parable of the Last Judgment, and with special reference to the text, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal," I made certain statements which I have been asked to repeat, or at any rate to restate in simpler form. This I willingly do, for the truth then declared is one which, of all others, needs clear and unhesitating statement in an age like the present.

You remember that I told you on that occasion that the word "everlasting" is the word which in the same sentence is translated "eternal." They ought not to be two words, for they are only one. Neither is "everlasting" the best translation of the term. It should be "eternal" in both cases. The word eternal signifies a something which is not explained by the English word everlasting. It is not something which begins after death, but that which we are living now. This is eternity Eternity is that which is, as opposed to that which seems. Eternal life, to quote the words of our

Lord Himself, is to know God. Eternal punishment therefore, if we are to use the word punishment at all, is the opposite of this. It is the result of the deliberate putting away from ourselves of the life that ought to be lived with God. If there be a man here seeking God, and who yet feels he has not found Him, he whose search is sincere, humble, and true, that man has found Him. "Thou wouldst not seek Me if thou hadst not already found Me." But if there be a man here who once stood near to God and felt the joy of serving Him, whose life, though narrow in range, was wide in opportunity and grand in experience, and has forfeited all this by the deliberate choice of what was mean and base and selfish and worldly, that man is undergoing eternal punishment now, for he has chosen the seeming in opposition to the real, he has deliberately thrust from him that life which in heaven he would have enjoyed in greater fulness, but not in different kind from the life which he might live now, the life of God.

Life eternal is to know God. That man has invoked his own punishment who from his life has thrust God away. As this does not seem to have been perfectly understood last time I taught it, I take another of our Lord's solemn sayings on the same subject as my text to-night. It is even more solemn than the parable which is usually described as the parable of the Last Judgment. The words in the ninth of St Mark are terrible. Take them

literally, take them symbolically, take them as you will, they are full of solemn warning, even of something more than warning, of menace against the man who chooses a way of his own. There has been much unintelligent comment upon this chapter, and especially upon this portion of it. It can hardly be necessary to say that Jesus was actually quoting in the use of these words. You will find the original, or part of them at any rate, in the last verse of the sixty-sixth chapter of Isaiah. Our Lord knew the Old Testament, whatever we do. Here is the prophet's description of the chastisements overtaking the evil-doers of his day, a purification stern in its method, beneficent in its effect. "It shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before Me, saith the Lord. And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcases of the men that have transgressed against Me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh." The simple men whom our Lord addressed knew where that figure of the undying worm came from and the unquenchable fire, and they were standing near to the historic spot thus described in the words of the prophet, where criminals were done to death, where Israel had been purified by the edge of the sword, where worms were busy upon the putrefying corpses, where the fire was lit to carry the stench away. Our Lord made instant

use of the figure thus supplied, and Himself applied it to the moral life, the life that we have to live now, and He said not one word about the life beyond the grave. Speaking, not of death, but of life, He means, "Let nothing stand between you and right, no suffering, no sacrifice, for destruction waits upon every form of wrong, and pain follows upon every act of sin."

Now, to relate this text to the common belief and experience, perhaps the best way in which to put this relation will be to restate in your hearing that which you already know perfectly, the creed of popular theology concerning the great facts of life and sin and redemption with which we are all familiar. It may be put thus—I mean the theology that is just passing away, sometimes miscalled the old theology, but in reality a very new theology, it is only of yesterday, and like yesterday it is dead or dying—We are all sinners and deserve to go to hell. The hell that is meant is usually a place of torment, torment unending on the other side of death, a hell which you will never see until the angel of death summons you. We are all sinners, says this popular creed, but God has provided a victim to endure an equivalent of what we have deserved. Jesus died upon the Cross, therefore we need not suffer. He died in time, the agony was only for a few hours, but that which He did effect was a deliverance which will only begin when we touch eternity, deliverance from the consequences

of sin; though we may feel, as a corollary to this belief, that forgiveness is ours now, we may thank God and receive it.

It is true that this doctrine has been held with qualifications. I leave out any reference, for instance, to the doctrine of election, by which some are supposed to have been predestined to everlasting bliss, taking effect at the same moment, on the other side of death, and some to eternal woe, eternal meaning everlasting. We omit also reference to Antinomianism, by which it was held that those who were of Christ, those who had availed themselves of this mighty work of His need not trouble about righteousness of life. All their guilt had been transferred to Him, not only the past and the present, but the future too, and they need not trouble themselves about living any too well.

But the popular qualifications are these—First, the impenitent are not held to be included. Practically Christ did not die for all the world; He only died for those who lay hold upon His atonement, the rest are left out of account. Secondly, even the penitent, however, must put on holiness, or he may forfeit that which Christ has effected for him. There was a great deal of truth lying beneath all this I have stated thus crudely because it is held crudely. I am not here to sneer at it, because down at the bottom of this statement of truth there was something which we must never let go, for if we

do, we do it at our peril. But as a matter of fact, men have ceased or are ceasing to believe it. I question if more than a few in this great congregation believe it just as I have stated it. The pulpit is becoming increasingly silent about it. It is only here and there that you will hear a preacher insist upon it in all its vividness—I was going to say its rawness. Instead of that preachers will as a rule vaguely imply that there is something or other, uncomfortable, unwelcome, but well deserved, awaiting you upon the other side of death if you do not believe and lay hold here upon the facts I have mentioned concerning the redeeming work of Christ. But, however vaguely they may state it, I say men are not greatly interested in it. If I were to preach it to-night with all the emphasis I know, you would feel that I was striking a false note. Some of you would never come here again, for you would feel that the prophet had no message, in fact he was no prophet at all; he was stating what your conscience and your better self repudiated.

Do not be in too great a hurry, however, I will show you what it is you really repudiate. We have come to think three things about this form of doctrine.

First, that it is immoral to punish anyone else for my sin, for your sin. Listen to the word punish. It is immoral to punish anyone else for your sin or for mine. Moreover, it is impossible. No one has ever been punished for anybody else's sin; only the

sinner can be punished. Though at the same time we all admit the grand counter-principle running through all life; it is that vicarious suffering, voluntarily borne, is grand and noble and divine. Many a person has stood in the way of another's punishment and taken it himself, but when it fell upon him it was no punishment; it was something else, it was glorious. That principle it is the highest exemplification of which—no, the root and inspiration of it—we discern at Calvary. Vicarious punishment and vicarious suffering are as wide as the poles apart.

Secondly, we do not, we cannot get rid of the consequences of our sin by the merits of anyone else. So much of repentance in these days and all days is repentance of merely what follows the sin, and not of the sin itself. We are punished, experience tells us so, and we do not have to wait for death. Sometimes we try to cheat ourselves that it is not so, but it is with a misgiving at the bottom of our heart all the time. We know that no act of faith, however definite and however strong, saves us from bearing the penal consequences of our wrong-doing. In the church to-night, it may be, there sits a man who contracted a bad habit in his youth. He could have stopped it then; he acted in defiance of good counsel, of fatherly love and motherly devotion. He braved their prayers, he mocked their faith. Now, if that man had to go back and begin again, what do you think he would

do with his life? Let the devil at his elbow tell you. He has put himself in the hands of a something which is now stronger than he. It has laid its clammy, iron grip upon his moral nature. He is a slave and a sufferer, and he knows it. Let any preacher mock that man by saying, "Come, my friend, come to the Cross, confess your sin, there is no hell for you," he would say, "Liar! I am in hell now."

Thirdly, it is impossible to believe—I am stating what you feel, remember—that any sin can deserve punishment from everlasting to everlasting. Re-reading John Henry Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* a few days ago I came across a sentence I had never noticed before. It was something to this effect—It were better for a soul to endure extremest torment through endless ages rather than commit one venial sin. This John Henry Newman declared to be the belief of the Catholic Church. I am not quite so sure that it is. If it were, I feel sure your conscience and mine would be compelled to repudiate it; it puts dishonour upon God. The reason why so many of the pulpit appeals fail nowadays is because men have come, they hardly know how, to protest in the name of some higher law against these implications of the older doctrine. We do not believe these things, we cannot believe them. The man in the street will not be won by them. No man, I verily believe, is ever terrified by this kind of language about retribution into choosing the Kingdom of God.

Let me repeat these three things which, though we repudiate them, contain a truth, a truth I am going to set forth again. First, you feel that it is immoral that anybody should be asked to bear your punishment. If you are a true man, and your repentance is genuine, you never ask anyone to take your place and take your stripes. Secondly, we know we do not get rid of the consequences by swallowing this belief or that about the forgiveness of sin. The consequences are here, and in some cases at any rate, we watch them working out with all the inexorableness of fate. Thirdly, we do not believe, however stern the consequences of wrong-doing may be, that they ought to continue from everlasting to everlasting. All retribution misses its meaning here and God is dethroned, for I can never see any meaning in retribution for any purpose except it be in the interests of the sinner. If it fall upon him in sharpness it is not for the sake of vengeance but for the sake of something higher and nobler.

Now, brethren, observe the serious result of this way of thinking of ours. It has weakened moral appeal. Good old Christians listening to me to-night are trembling for what I will say next, for fear one should condone wrong-doing or make any man or woman in this place to-night feel that it matters little whether they do right or wrong if somehow and inevitably things will come agreeable at the end; it has weakened the moral appeal;

men feel, or some men feel, that they can afford to trifle with the moral law. You cannot. Listen again to the words of Jesus, "It were better to enter into life maimed than having two hands to go into the moral Gehenna, into the fire that shall never be quenched, where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." There is no suggestion there of the inevitableness of escape from what sin deserves, there is no thought of how little it matters to do that which is wrong and to live the life which is base. Nay, right is right, and wrong is wrong, and each meets with its due sequence of reward. I want you to listen to two things here. First, death is not of much importance. The common soldier is no theologian, the life-boatman perhaps could state no article of doctrine with clearness and fulness, neither are they particularly anxious to count what follows death, and see with clearness what awaits them, but these men at the call of duty, of high service, of right-doing, will lay down their life. In our best moments we are all the same. Death does not frighten us if we meet it breast forward and along the line of high duty. It is not of much importance, and it cancels no debt; it only means a new focus, and not a new man. Observe that our Lord does not dwell upon it in His teaching. You have no warrant in the words of Jesus for supposing that death marks an epoch either of reward or retribution. It is life with which He was concerned, life with which we

are all concerned, too, living truly or falsely, rightly or wrongly, nobly or basely, and God has written His law in men's hearts so that they know it matters much to choose the highest and quit the lowest, to live nobly rather than ignobly, to seek duty rather than pleasure, the good rather than the great. Jesus put this into all His teaching—the reward and the retribution begin now.

I brought into the pulpit a copy of "Jane Eyre," which probably everyone in the congregation has read. I draw your attention to the creed of Charlotte Brontë as it appears in one of the early pages of this book:—

"Life appears to me too short to be spent in nursing animosity or registering wrongs. We are, and must be one and all, burdened with faults in this world: but the time will soon come when, I trust, we shall put them off in putting off our corruptible bodies; when debasement and sin will fall from us with this cumbrous frame of flesh, and only the spark of the spirit will remain—the impalpable principle of life and thought, pure as when it left the Creator to inspire the creature. . . . Surely it will never, on the contrary, be suffered to degenerate from man to fiend? No; I cannot believe that. I hold another creed . . . it makes Eternity a rest—a mighty home, not a terror and an abyss."

Now, brethren, while I believe that is God's purpose for mankind, I believe it is not quite as stated here.

"As the tree falls, so must it lie;
As a man lives, so shall he die."

Death is only a turning in the road. It is not a fresh beginning, it is only a new morning, and when

you import death, as you do, into your theology, you forget that your Master seldom or never did.

> "I sent my Soul through the Invisible,
> Some letter of that After-life to spell:
> And by and by my soul return'd to me,
> And answer'd 'I Myself am Heaven and Hell.'"

The second thing I want you to remember is this—every thought reacts upon the thinker, every deed upon the doer. The penalty of every sin is contained in the sin itself. That penalty begins to work out from the moment the sin was conceived. The harvest may be long in coming, but it all comes, here or hereafter, in this life or in the life beyond, or both. This is more terrible than the doctrine we have been discussing to-night, because it is absolutely and inevitably true. "God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man seweth that shall he also reap." Every stone flung upward from a human hand will come down with precisely the same force with which it was hurled.

> "The tissues of the life to be
> We weave with colours all our own,
> And in the field of destiny
> We reap as we have sown."

Every lie rebounds upon him who speaks it. The man who robs a brother finds a brother avenged. It is the living God Who is the avenger. The same act may be one of self-mutilation or it may be the retribution of the Most High. You ruin a woman. It may be that upon this side of death,

let alone upon the other, the worm that dieth not, in the gnawings of remorse, will bring home to you the foolishness, the utter madness of the sin.

It is possible that I have stated this truth so strongly as to cause in some a certain shrinking of heart, in others a certain feeling of protest. Somebody will be saying to himself "Alas! for the sinner. Is God a mere machine? Is it all inexorable justice? Is there no hope in Christ? Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Come back and think of the old gospel, the same gospel that was preached by the apostle. We take our stand now by the side of those who heard Jesus utter the words of our text. Repent—the old, old method, the old, old way. Repent, not of the consequences, but of the sin. Fear only to sink in weakness and shame.

There are men listening to me to-night who can find no way out of a moral entanglement in which they have involved themselves, and they have little hope. Suppose I speak to a young lad thus—You have been tempted this week in the shaping of your career to take advantage of someone else. You have been tempted to stain your soul with a lie. You have been tempted to thrust down another that you might claim what the world calls success. You have been tempted to turn your back upon your father's principles, tempted to do something foul and base

and wrong, in the hope of a profit that is to come by and by. You defend yourself thus—"If I do not, the gate will not open; if I do not, life will press hardly upon me. I feel myself full of ambition, full of the stirrings of a new-found power. I want a chance to live. I can atone for all this by and by. Only a little sin at the outset of life, and afterwards, oh! what there might be in fulness and richness and gladness. I might be a power for good." Cut it off! It means death. Out with it! Do not dally for an instant with excuses. Have done with it! I will tell you of someone who went through this temptation before you. His name was Jesus, and He was the author of the words of our text. He faced it in the wilderness. The bending of the knee to Satan, and to-morrow the throne of the Cæsars, oh! the power for good that that might mean! And the answer was, "Get thee hence!" A small life rather than a great, if it must be, the cross rather than the throne! "It is better to enter into life maimed than having two hands to go into the Gehenna of fire." The Jesus Who went through the conflict chose the self-mutilation and the lonely life and the crown of thorns and the betrayal and the agony and the shame and the death because He knew it was not death. Enter into life maimed, for it is life eternal now. It is choosing God and knowing God. And, my young brother, the day will come when you would give all you possess to have the chance again.

No sin was ever sinned yet that was worth while. The evil comes home to roost, and, however long it takes for the effect to work out, it comes, it comes on, and it has not done coming when death comes, perhaps it is only beginning. The man who chooses the lower level instead of the higher finds out his blunder, and, oh, what a sad and terrible disenchantment. Do you not feel that this is eternally true?

There was a powerful book published some time ago, "The Silence of Dean Maitland." It was a parable of the life of every man who deliberately chooses the way of the sinner. It began in little things, little things for which excuse was made. Then it led to greater things, then to a life lie, a lie that was told by silence. All through that man's life of outwardly glorious success the worm was gnawing at his heart. There was no panacea for remorse. The fire was not quenched. And at last the hand had to come off and the eye to come out, and public confession was made and justice was vindicated and right was done. It is not only in the case of Dean Maitland appearing on the pages of fiction that this is so. It is always so. There is no escape from it. Either at the beginning or at the end the sacrifice has to be made. The cheaper and the better, as well as the nobler, is in the wilderness, facing the adversary at the beginning of the life work. Repentance is cutting off that you may enter in. It is life eternal here and now.

I also brought into the pulpit another book from

which I intended to quote to you to-night, Ruskin's "Crown of Wild Olive." It seems strange to me that this generation is already, as it were, beginning to forget one of the greatest prophets God ever gave to them, John Ruskin. I am about to quote from his essay on War, which was delivered as an address to the students of a military college.

"In general, I have no patience with people who talk of 'the thoughtlessness of youth' indulgently. I had infinitely rather hear of thoughtless old age, and the indulgence due to *that*. When a man has done his work, and nothing can any way be materially altered in his fate, let him forget his toil, and jest with his fate, if he will; but what excuse can you find for wilfulness of thought, at the very time when every crisis of future fortune hangs on your decisions? A youth thoughtless! when all the happiness of his home for ever depends on the chances, or the passions, of an hour! A youth thoughtless! when the career of all his days depends on the opportunity of a moment! A youth thoughtless! when his every act is as a torch to the laid train of future conduct, and every imagination a fountain of life or death! Be thoughtless in *any* after years, rather than now—though, indeed, there is only one place where a man may be nobly thoughtless—his death-bed. No thinking should ever be left to be done *there*."

This is true teaching! These are the words of eternal life, they are the echo of the teaching of Him who uttered the text we have had in our minds and before our eyes this night.

This is the spirit of Jesus that speaks. Repentance—repentance brings every man back to the feet of the Christ whether he knows it or not. You never yet were sorry for sin, but you were

standing in the presence of the Crucified. You never turned your back upon a wrong but what you had something to do with the Christ. How much can Christ do for you? Everything! You leave the future to Him. If any man here has been thinking wrong and thinking lightly about it and thrusting from him the thought of to-morrow or that far off, shadowy future, where his evil may be buried in oblivion for ever, let him make no mistake about it. Halt just where you are and turn back upon that road and go back to the height from which you have come down. The only place of safety is here. The further on, the deeper doom.

It may cost something. What does that matter? There is only one thing you have to think about at this time, that is, get rid of everything that is base and unholy and impure! Down with it! Let the Christ be glorified in your life. For already the hand of that same Christ is at work here, and all that needs to be done to rescue you from the grip of the adversary He will do. He can remit all the consequences of evil if He pleases. He hath suffered for the sin of the world. But you must not make terms with Him. What you must do is to cut off the hand if it be necessary, lop off the foot, pluck out the eye. But be right with God rather than wrong with the dominion of the whole world. And if you do, the day will come, perhaps it will not be so very far distant, when you will hear

the same Jesus speak again, and this is what He will say:—

"Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

THE HIGHEST SELF-OFFERING

The following sermon was preached because of a confession made to me of mistaken loyalty on the part of one or two people, resulting in what amounted to a deliberate breach of the law of God. It suddenly struck me that beneath those unhappy histories there was something in its essence good and noble, and which might be turned to high account. The woman who shielded her husband in his continued practice of cheating someone else, and the man who was prepared to give up church and Christ and splendid usefulness for the sake of a fashionable, worldly young woman, whom he could obtain on no other terms, were here described. To particularise too plainly might have caused offence, so the lesson of the highest self-offering was pointed out through other lives.

X

"And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thy hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him: For now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me."—GENESIS xxii. 10, 11, 12.

HERE is an instructive, and, rightly understood, an inspiring incident, and yet it is one to which justice has seldom been done. Much has been spoken and written concerning it, but the commentators have often wandered sadly from the point. Even King James's translators appear to have misunderstood or only partially comprehended the significance of it. The title they give to the chapter is "Abraham tempted to offer Isaac." "He giveth proof of his faith and obedience." Apparently those seventeenth century scholars considered that the chapter should be thought of as the trial of Abraham's faith. I would rather call it the raising or the purifying of Abraham's faith. They would almost give us the idea that God needed to discover something about Abraham. The truth is, this chapter teaches us that Abraham had to discover something about God. God did not tempt Abraham to any deed of violence. Instead of that He raised the faith of Abraham and

the service and even the character of Abraham to a higher level than they had ever occupied before.

Modern biblical criticism, or some part of it, has gone to quite the other extreme. I need hardly tell this congregation that there are biblical scholars who believe and teach that Abraham was a myth, that this story is a legend, that it may have ethical value, and so on, but we must not look upon it as literal history. Well, frankly, it matters not to me if it were so, because it is true of some servant of God in every generation, and the offering of Isaac is repeated and consummated perhaps every day in the year in this very land of ours. But for all that I think it is historically true, and true just as it stands. And I think so on the ground of what we may regard as internal criticism. Let us try to put ourselves sympathetically in the place of this man who offered his beloved in reality to God, whether he sacrificed him or no.

Abraham was little better than an Arab sheik, brought up amidst surroundings as widely different from yours or mine as it is possible to suppose. Yet he had the same moral problems to meet, the same decisions to give, the same God to serve. He was so far different from those in the midst of whom he lived that he could not bring himself to believe in a god who was worshipped by sensuality and by shame, but in a God whose nature was righteousness. This it is that marks Abraham off from his times and entitles him to our respect and to the

name of the friend of God. But he had been educated, too, within a circle of ideas the influence of which he could not escape, any more than you and I can escape the intellectual environment of our own time. Religion was often a matter of human sacrifice, of horror, of terror and of woe. Religion has been made such in many generations in the history of mankind. We have not to travel very far from this spot to find that in a measure it is so to-day—a thing of woe and darkness rather than of joy and light.

Abraham, however, having discovered his God of righteousness, now proceeds to test himself with regard to the validity of all earthly affection, and I can imagine, as he feels his pride, his fatherly pride in his dear son, growing day by day, that the influence of early training would sometimes come over him. He would feel at the bottom of his heart a certain misgiving as to the purity and rightness of this love. "Ought I to care so much for my boy? Am I keeping back from God something that ought to be His? Am I, in fact, worshipping another god than the God I have found? Is Isaac mine or His? Would it be a sublime thing, in fact, does God want it—that I offer my boy, as my father and my father's father have offered their boys to their gods?" Then the moment comes, the resolution is taken, he sets out upon his journey, and the lad who is to be his victim accompanies him, unquestioning,

for Isaac had a part in this event. And still thinking and still troubling over the question, they arrive at the mount of sacrifice. Abraham binds him who is dearer than life itself to the old man, lays him on the altar, and prepares for the last dread blow. But he cannot deliver it. As he looks at his victim who has so often lain in his arms he lifts the knife, but puts it down again. Can he strike? His religion and the ideas of worship in which he was trained tell him to deal the blow and get it over. Something else cries, "Hold! lay not thine hand upon the lad." This was a moral crisis and a terrible crisis, too, for Abraham; and it is because of the vividness with which it is pictured here that I venture to think, critic or no critic, it took place. He looks at his lad, he looks at his knife, and then the highest prevails. It was as though an angel spoke to him, for God did speak in the mind of this heroic, single-minded servant, who with a very dim light shining in his soul chose to serve at his best. He let the knife fall, and, clasping his hands, lifted his face to heaven and spoke thus —these words ought to be put into his mouth rather than into the mouth of the angel—"My God, I shall not lay my hand upon the lad, Thy gift to me. I shall not do anything to him save love him as I did before. For Thou knowest that I fear Thee. Were there anything grand and good for which to give my child, Thou shouldst have him. I would not withhold my son, mine

only son, from Thee. It is not blood wherewith I serve Thee, but love, and if love called for blood it should be given, but Thou hast not called for blood this day." Thus the voice of the angel spoke in Abraham's own heart.

Abraham's highest self-offering was made when he was ready to give, if occasion demanded, if anything high and noble and true called for it, the life of his son, his own life of lives. "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee but to deal justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with Him?"

From this incident, in all probability, sprang the higher religion which marks off Israel from the kindred peoples from which Israel came. If Abraham had not seen at the altar that human sacrifice, as such, did not please God, but the highest sacrifice of all, which would allow nothing to stand between the soul and righteousness, there would have been no chosen people. Israel would never have been born but for Abraham's perception of this great spiritual truth. And something more is shown to us in this very chapter, which I think the commentators have missed—"Jehovah Jireh"—"The Lord will provide" is the translation. Better still, "The Lord will *see*." The Lord Who searches the heart knows what Abraham would do if righteousness needed, knows what he would give if love of truth commanded. There is no barrier between

earthly love and heavenly love. "The Lord will see," as the Lord hath seen. Here was the highest self-offering of which the soul was capable. He was offering that which was dearer to him than life itself.

The principle herein declared, the situation herein described, has repeated itself in human history a thousand times since that far-off day—a thousand times?—may be a thousand thousand times. It teaches us this—God requires no meaningless sacrifice from any man. I said, no meaningless sacrifice, but there are occasions in life when earthly affection has to be sacrificed to eternal truth, when a lower love has to be offered up in the name of a higher. Well is it for him who can discern the occasion when it comes.

To illustrate what I am here teaching, let me refer you to two incidents, which I think separately I have mentioned to you before. One I take from Professor Lecky's "History of European Morals." In his account of mediæval monasticism, Mr Lecky gives an illustration, told in the monastic chronicles themselves, to this effect. A father, weary of the world and the world's ideals, one day appears at the gate of a monastery, leading by the hand his little son. You will be wise enough and large-minded enough to say along with me that, in that grim and barbarous time, a monastery represented the nearest approach to the Christian ideal that was to be found. This man wanted to flee the world and all its tumults, all its rewards likewise, and chose instead the service of

God as he saw it. He was received at the monastery gate, but on condition that he submitted himself to every test of his sincerity. These men were grimly in earnest, indeed, who lived within the cloistered walls. They took his little boy away from him, clothed him in rags, beat and tortured him in the presence of the father, starved him whilst the company ate—could the father eat, I wonder? Day after day and week after week went by, the child growing thinner and thinner and sadder and sadder. The father steeled his heart, believing that this was the service of the living God. He was saving his own soul by crucifying his flesh and blood, by trampling, as he was being taught, on earthly affection. The hour came when the supreme test was applied. The abbot bade him take his child in his arms, carry him to the river that ran past the monastery, and fling him in. The father obeyed without question. Poor child, I wonder what he thought as he lay in these callous arms. But at the moment when the deed was to be done the abbot's hand stayed the man, as the voice of the angel had stayed Abraham. "Now we know," was the verdict, "your sincerity. Now we are aware that nothing will stand between you and Christ. Your soul is saved, come back, spare your child."

Before I comment upon this incident, let me place another beside it; then perhaps but little comment will be needed. I have here what is to me a very precious book, an old edition of Bunyan's "Pilgrim's

Progress," in which there is a memoir of the author, that great preacher and saint, one of the noblest vindicators of the form of religion under which you and I worship to-day. John Bunyan went to prison for his faith, in a day when it meant much to suffer, and he endured within those prison walls some things which were harder than death. He was brought before his judges, and was told, so he tells it in his own words, "Hear your judgment. You must be taken back again to the prison, there to lie during the king's pleasure. If you do not submit to go to Church and hear divine service and leave your preaching, you must be banished this realm, and after that if you shall be found in this realm without special licence from the king you must hang by the neck till you are dead. And so," said Bunyan, "he bade my gaoler have me away." The hero answered thus—"I am at a point with you. If I were out of prison to-day I would preach the gospel again to-morrow by the help of God." If the narrative stopped even there it would be inspiring. We should feel that was a true man, and a brave and a humble. He made no oration. His speech was a good deal shorter than his judges', but nothing more needed to be said. But now there came the parting from his wife and children, and in his own vivid phraseology it is thus described. "Oh, the thought of the hardship to my poor blind child. I thought it would break my heart in pieces. It was as the pulling of the

flesh from my bones. I saw I was as a man who was pulling down his house upon the heads of his wife and children." I think I can quote the rest myself. Speaking of the poor blind child who came day by day to the prison to take away the little work by which Bunyan was able to support them all in some degree, he said, "Poor child! how hard it is like to go with thee in this world. Thou must be beaten, must suffer hunger, cold, and nakedness, and yet I cannot endure that even the wind should blow upon thee." Do we not feel, you and I, that in this speech there was something almost tragical? Here was a man to whom the stake would have meant nothing, a man who could have faced torture and shame and death with equanimity. He was putting on the altar that day what was dearer to him than a thousand lives. His blind child, his wife, his other dear ones, were offered to the service of the Most High and for love of Jesus Christ.

Now we will take our mediæval saint again. The two incidents look very much alike. Are they? They are infinitely apart. The one is squalid, the other is sublime. The would-be saint's offering was fanaticism born of selfishness. He was saving his soul at the cost of his child. Bunyan's was the supremest form of self-sacrifice of which he was capable.

These two men take us back to Abraham and that altar on the top of Mount Moriah. Abraham might have been like the mediæval saint, and he

might have struck his blow, but something higher stayed his hand, and that something higher was the spirit that controlled Bunyan; the prayer which is here put into the mouth of the angel, was a sort of hymn of praise to the God Whom he had discovered, Who asks for the highest, not the lowest, Who will be content with nothing less. He was prepared for sacrifice if love and honour and duty and heroism called for it. But they did not call, so the lad was spared. The particular had given way to the universal, the temporal had given way to the eternal. The question most men have to face some time or other is—What shall we do when the highest form of giving is asked for, the yielding of love in the name of righteousness? Abraham's answer you have, Bunyan's only expresses it a little more vividly. We know, then, what God requires of us.

Now, brethren, to bring the matter still more plainly home to our consciousness, let me adduce modern experience. To-day is yours and mine. It is but a year or two since England was stirred at the news that Lord Roberts had been commanded to go to the front and direct the movements of the British troops in South Africa. In a dark hour of the history of his country he went—it was a darker hour in his own. His boy had fallen on the field of Colenso, and I who speak to you to-night went to see the spot where he fell, and stood on it, and thought what I am now telling you. We were all

greatly moved with admiration when the veteran, without a word about his own sorrow, went bravely to the front at the call of duty. He was serving his country, not counting the cost, and it does not matter to us at the moment whether the service in which he was engaged was (so far as the policy is concerned) right or wrong. He was right to go. The sympathetic fibre in our hearts is touched for this reason—that man if he had had another son, would have laid him down if England had wanted him. Now England called for the father himself. Would he have given more gladly his life or his boy? The question need not be answered. Lord Roberts gave his son and gave himself, he gave himself in his son before he ever saw South Africa.

Well, now, I have instanced a man in high station. I am going to tell you about another whom you do not know, and perhaps only two people in this congregation do know. A man who never had more than thirty shillings a week in his life, but he did as much as, or more, than Lord Roberts. He stood exactly in the position in which Abraham stood on Mount Moriah. A working man in Brighton, a man of sterling character and moral worth, of delicate health, who had known struggle all his days, but who, unlike so many of his fellows, fears God and keeps His commandments, gave this as the explanation of his conduct in an hour of confidence to me. He said, "I was the son of a

man who had still less in his best days than I have ever had to spend. I was brought up in a poor home, all the poorer for the incident that made me what I hope I am." His father had been turned away from his work because he could and would not do a mean and shabby and wicked thing. He would not lie away his manhood, and he would not cheat another man's rights out of existence. The alternative was presented to him, "Comply or you go." He thought about his wife and children, laid them on the altar of duty, and went. "And," says my friend (for I am proud to claim him as a friend), "I was the only one of the family old enough to know what it had cost my father. He did not tell me, it was my mother. As she cut the last loaf for the children her tears were falling fast over the bread, and I questioned her to know why. She took me aside and explained, and I have never forgotten how my heart swelled and my bosom throbbed as in sympathy I took my stand with my father. She said, 'He is a true man, he has done right. We must praise God, we must trust Him for our bread.'" He continued, "They were hard times and anxious. We came through at last, but in a manner of speaking we never got back where my father voluntarily stepped from. But, oh, don't I love and revere his memory! All that is good in me to-day I feel I owe to that man's influence and example. He was a father of whom to be proud, a man of God!"

Brethren, there are so few of these fathers in this England of ours to-day that some of us are beginning to wonder whether her glory is over. You would not have to ask the question if you could multiply that man by a hundred thousand. The destiny of our nation would be safe.

It was Abraham's principle again. God asked for something, not that He did not know what His servant would do, but His servant had to know it, like Abraham as he stood at the altar counting the cost. His decision was this :—

> "Because right is right, to follow right
> Were wisdom in the scorn of consequence."

So on the altar, like Bunyan, he put his wife and babes, came out a hero and a conqueror for the living God.

You and I may have to be confronted with this very question in some other form. I think this man of the Bible did not solve it any more truly than the working man at Brighton, and we read the Bible wrong and mistake its significance if we think Abraham had any greater help to rescue him or any severer tests to pass through or any deeper spiritual questions to solve than you or I. Abraham's God is my God, your God, the God of my Brighton friend, and it is his question we have to solve in another form. May we never mistake its meaning. Sometimes you may stumble into the blunder of Mr Lecky's mediæval saint, or you may rise to the height of Bunyan and the Brighton working man. Which

shall it be? I have heard people say things like this, "God knows I loved that lad too much, so He took him away. He left me lonely and left me sad, but then I ought not to have loved anyone in excess." Or I have heard the word of warning: "Mother, father, do not adore that child as you do. Do not pour your affection upon him without reserve as you are in danger of doing. Oh, be careful, because he may be taken from you. You may be loving him too much." Beloved, that is a lie! We never love anyone too much. God never asks from any man anything approaching to the sacrifice of noble affection. I am aware that there is something here that savours of the sacrifice that Bunyan made and that Abraham was willing to make, but the form in which the question is put savours more of Abraham's decision on the sacrificial morning. We never love too much, we only love too little. God is not a jealous God in that sense, that you are to take your child out of His way because He will be first. The prophet saw clearer who said, "If a man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God Whom he hath not seen?" But there is a love for which men and women will sin. The wife will lie for the husband, mothers will do wrong for their children, fathers will sin for home, friend will sacrifice to the devil for friend. Know, then, that in every case where such decision is taken you have sacrificed husband, wife, child, self, to the lower, and not to the higher. The highest love is

the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, and by that I mean the love of Christ which never spared, never will spare those whom He calls. He will have the highest, and the highest self-offering may mean, often does mean, Calvary. I wonder what the mother of Jesus thought when she saw Him hanging, agonising, dying, upon the cross. He did not spare her, because His Father had not given Him the word to come down from the cross. He hung there, and she suffered in Him. I wonder what Peter thought when he learned what it meant to follow the Nazarene after all. He had denied Him to save his own life, afraid of the lash in Pilate's hall when he saw it lacerating his Master's back—poor timid Galilean, afraid, yet loving all the time. But when the awful crisis was past and he met his Master again and sobbed out his shame and his sorrow, there was a new Peter. What did life mean now? Jesus promised no bed of roses, no fine time in this world, but He promised him a reward of which the world could not rob him, and I think I would rather have been Peter than Pilate a thousand times. Pilate had his chance and lost it, Peter had his again and took it. He went to stripes, imprisonment, contumely, shame, the cross—the actual wooden cross, upon which Peter died for His Master. That is the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, for where is Peter to-day? Nearer, perhaps, than you and I think. Heaven might press through this wall of film, and show us how things really are. What is death?

Nothing. Life is everything. "Fear not them that kill the body and after that have no more that they can do." But fear surrender to the base, fear to trifle with noble love, fear to stain with mud and dirt the affection which God has given you. Give all to Him. Consecrate all earth's affection at the altar, and if from the altar you must go to Calvary, then go! Love's highest is called for, the worthiest, the only one which you can offer in the presence of the Lamb of God. If you give it, you shall find your soul again, higher, purer, in the glory land. For in heaven all that you have ever loved that was worth loving, in heaven all that you have ever served that was worth serving, is in the keeping of the Lord Jesus. That Friend who never failed a friend has in reserve for you everything you have offered Him. Oh, if men knew what a blunder sin is, if they knew how little it was worth while to trifle with the opportunity that God gives, no altar would be set up by the hand divine on which we would be unwilling to place ourselves or lay the nearest and the dearest if God and the kingdom of heaven required it.

Let nothing stand between you and God and truth and right. The highest service you can render to a dear one is to love him too much to sin for him.

If any affection asks you to be disloyal to God and right and truth, nail it on the cross. It is your best course with what God has given you.

Here, it may be, I am coming closer to your experience. How do I know but that I am speaking to some person who is tempted for love's sake to compromise with what you know to be good? Never do it. Never stand for a moment in the presence of the adversary of your souls. Away with everything that hinders your approach to God. There may be those here who have known home tragedies too dreadful to be named in the public place. You perhaps know, mother, father, what David felt when in the line of his duty he sent an army against his son. You know that cry of agony that was wrung from his royal heart, "O, Absalom, my son, my son, Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" My friend, if there be any temptation upon your road which means surrender to a false love, I beseech you to have done with it. God will take you through, prepare Himself a lamb for the burnt offering. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

Stern and even terrible sometimes is the love of God, but it never fails the loved. Hold on to it, and it will save you. Hear the words of one who gave all that man could give to the service of the living God: "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

THIRSTING FOR THE WATER OF LIFE

THERE is a pathetic story attaching to the sermon which bears this title. I had in mind a good man whose quiet work in London many people have reason to thank God for, but who in his time has sinned and suffered deeply. There are few men for whom I have a greater respect, but not until lately have I been able to persuade him to put an end to his mournful habit of retrospection. He has allowed the consequences of one sad mistake to cloud the whole of his spiritual life. What he is principally slow to see is that self-reproach carried to excess is a form of unfaith. A full salvation is inconsistent with longing and regret for a day that is dead. Too great a readiness to turn one's back upon the past is a mark of shallowness, but the opposite is a kind of spiritual sombreness. There are many who fall into both errors.

XI

"And David longed, and said, Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Beth-lehem, which is by the gate!"—2 SAM. xxiii. 15.

THERE are some characters in song and story which have the power of impressing posterity with something of the charm felt in their presence by their contemporaries. It is not always easy to say just why. For instance, a book just issued gives us yet one more study added to the numerous and apparently never-ending series of studies of the character and career of Mary Queen of Scots. Even to English people, Mary Queen of Scots is always profoundly interesting. Can you tell me why? Some would say, "Yes, because such a mystery surrounds her career." That is not all: mystery surrounds many other people, but we are not all interested in solving it. The fact is there is something distinctly human about the character of Mary Queen of Scots. There is something in her which vibrates in the great heart of humanity the wide world over. That is why, with all her sin and sorrow, we feel her to be so truly typical of the experiences which are repeating themselves in every century and generation.

Such a character again is that of Alexander the

Great. His soldiers would have died for him willingly; they asked no greater honour, no higher ideal, than to perish in the sight of Alexander, doing his bidding, winning his battles. As we look back we can hardly understand why; yet Alexander lives for us as he lived for them: we feel him to be a real personality. Amid all the shadowy figures of history a man like this stands right out. Why is it? Why, in spite of his sensational ambition, there was something wonderfully human, rich, and deep in the character of Alexander. Closer to our own history and experience, perhaps, we come when we name King Alfred. Little is known about Alfred that is authentic; his name and work come down to us through the mists of legend. We cannot see distinctly the face of the great Saxon king, but he has cast a spell over us as he has cast a spell over many Englishmen since his own day. Why is it? This time because, however apocryphal the stories may be which are told about him, we feel the spell of personal goodness: it is a real man and a true that looks out upon us from that far century. Such a character again is Queen Elizabeth. Never was a British sovereign served by a nobler or greater band of men than stood around the throne of the maiden queen. There are flaws in that great character. A woman truly on some sides of her nature, she seemed to be a wild beast on others. The very men who served her best were by her lightly and easily forgotten. Yet Cromwell said—and we echo

Cromwell's words, looking back as he looked—"Queen Elizabeth of famous memory. We need not be ashamed to call her so." To a Scottish audience I would adduce as a similar figure in history, looming large and clear, Bonnie Prince Charlie. Of all the beautiful songs ever written or sung north of the Tweed, none excel those that have been composed concerning the personality of Prince Charles. Was he good? I am afraid I cannot say as much as that. How he falsified the promises of youth, this man who spent his days in lust and debauchery, and filled a drunkard's grave at last! Yet every person who reads his biography is touched by it, and feels a certain thrill of sympathy for Bonnie Prince Charlie and for his fate. Something clings to his personality that redeems him, in spite of his faults, and we can hardly say just what it is.

I have named a long series: we feel as if we have personal acquaintance with each of them. We cannot say just why it is they stand out, except it was that they are typical of humanity, as a whole, in its sins and sorrows, good and evil, joy and pain. They sounded the depths, they rose to the heights. Humanity vibrates in sympathy with such careers. Distinctively such was King David. I have purposely named these great ones of antiquity one by one, because I thought you might like to hear why it is that we feel that had we to place them in sequence we might place this Old Testament character first. Everybody feels that he knows King David. I

always feel as if I could recognise him in the street. We are not afraid of him at all; we are not awed by his majesty. We feel a certain sympathy and kinship with his character. Why is it? Just for the same reason as those whom I have already named come home to us. It is because of something distinctively human, real, deep, and true in the nature of this Israelitish king. Oh, he sinned deeply, he repented agonisingly, he suffered greatly, he won grandly. He is described as a man after God's own heart; but that was not because he never sinned a sin or never made a mistake. Take his life. Here was an adulterer, a man of treachery, lust, and evil; a man who sunk as low as it is possible for a man to do, and retain anything to which we can give the name of manhood; yet, in spite of it all, we feel as if there were something generous, noble, child-like, in the nature of King David, which showed itself time and again, and stamps him truly human. This was the man who loved Jonathan, who mourned for Absalom. In all history, in all literature, there is no more pathetic cry than the cry that went up from that bereaved father's heart: "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" That alone would bring us close to the heart of King David, but here in this chapter is told a simple incident that shows us something like the spell of Alexander upon his followers. David had around him mighty

men, who loved, worshipped, followed, would have laid down their lives for him. One day, toward the end of his life, the weary old king, looking back upon the scenes of his childhood, murmurs a prayer aloud, and the dull ears of the mighty men catch it. They speed to gratify his wish; they do it at the jeopardy of their lives. It was a grand deed. "Oh," cried the king, "that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!" When they had brought it, their own blood being the price of it, and placed it in his hands, he could not drink it. "Be it far from me, O Lord, that I should do this: is not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives?" Therefore, he would not drink it, but poured it out unto the Lord. I say there is something dramatic there, something beautifully human, something grand on both sides. David was no less typically human, standing on his pedestal, than were the three mighty men who won for him the drink that he said he longed for.

Do you think they brought David precisely what he wanted? No; the mighty men missed seeing something that you and I can see now, looking back. David was a poet, a seer; the tongue that uttered this prayer was one which, though it may not have uttered it for the first time, must have sung in the house of God: "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, He leadeth me beside the waters of

rest." It was David the poet who spoke. The weary old man, drawing toward the evening of his days, looking back upon the Bethlehem of his youth, where he used to keep his father's sheep in the fold, and thinking of the long, dreary pilgrimage between that day and this, utters, almost in the spirit of the Shepherd Psalm, the plaint and the prayer, "Oh, that I could go back; oh, that one would give me to drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem!" An impossible prayer. The king could not be the shepherd boy again; the innocence of his joyous youth was past. But I think I know what he felt, and so do you. Recently I went to visit a spot where some of my childhood's days were spent, and some of the very happiest I have ever spent anywhere. I went to look at the old scenes that I thought I remembered so well. It was a sad vision. The old home was in ruins in the ground; a little way up the road there was a spring well, by the side of which I used, as a boy, to play. I saw so many changes that I did not even want to go and look. But a kind friend took me as guide. "Good water, Mr Campbell," he said. "I know that," I replied; but I did not drink it. David did not want that water, he wanted childhood again, and childhood's radiance, sweetness and purity. I think I felt just a little as David must have felt. The water was no good to him. He could not go back; you and I cannot go back.

Is there a single person who does not feel some-

thing of this in his experience? There may be some who do not look back upon their childhood with anything approaching pleasure. I see one man whose childhood was one long tragedy. Now the Lord has led him to a large place; but for the most of us it is not so. We look back for something, we can hardly describe what; but something we miss in life as it is. We were nearer to heaven, to reality, to sweetness once—or so we sometimes feel—than we are to-day. Gazing into your faces, I read history in every one—moral experience chiselled in. Some of you look careworn, tired, unable for the burden of life; some as though you are ready to lay it down. Others standing up to it, as it were, strong, rich, full in your manhood; but you bear the scars, and on every one of you is the handwriting of time, pain, sorrow. Do you never look wistfully back, wish you had your opportunities again, feel as though you would make a better thing of life, with fewer mistakes, fewer things to regret if you could only start once more? Do you think about the chequered way that you have come? And now with David's experience, you are living through your happy childhood, when you knew nothing about life as you know it now. Some of you never dreamed of being in the City Temple this morning, and you wish that everything during the last five, ten, or twenty years, which has culminated in your being in this place this

morning could be blotted out. You were in a holier once, or so you feel, when you lisped your prayer beside your mother's knee, when you lived under the shadow of your father's good name. Love came then, and made life richer and fuller; sorrow followed it, and made it darker and emptier; sin came, and blackened it. The old home is gone; the old environment, the sweet fleckless experience, so heavenly, so pure. "Oh, for a drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!" David longs and says. There are more poets than David to say it for us; and many a poet has said it since. One of the greatest of our own, reared as it were in our very atmosphere, writes thus:—

> "As life wanes, all its strife and care and toil
> Seem strangely valueless, while the old trees
> Which grew by our youth's home, the waving mass
> Of climbing plants, heavy with bloom and dew
> The morning swallows, with their songs like words—
> All these seem clear and only worth our thought."

Browning and Tennyson changed rôles for once—it is the latter that strikes the sublimer as well as the more familiar note:—

> "Break, break, break,
> On thy cold grey stones, O sea!
> And I would that my tongue could utter
> The thoughts that arise in me."
>
> "Break, break, break,
> At the foot of thy crags, O sea!

But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me."

This is a very natural feeling, and there are many ways of treating it; here is one—I name it only to reject it—the way of Cynicism and Pessimism. It is to steel heart and mind against melancholy, remorse, and even affectionate regret. You may pass a day in comparative quiet if you try not to feel, not to realise, not to look back.

"Ah! my belovèd, fill the cup that clears
To-day of past regrets and future fears;
To-morrow!—why, to-morrow I may be
Myself with yesterday's sev'n thousand years."

That will not satisfy except for a moment. We may all feel ourselves in that mood, but we do not stay there. The Persian poet himself did not; he knew that there was another and higher way. It is this—to realise that true life, the life of the soul, never grows old, although it grows up. Our true home never is, never was, amid the symbols and shadows of time, but in the grand reality of eternity. The well of Bethlehem in the morning—there is no turning back to it in the afternoon. There is a farther, a more glorious morning, a deeper, a nobler, a purer draught from the waters of God, the waters of rest. The soul in growing older is not farther from God than in the days of sweet innocence. To turn in simplest, most childlike trust to God, truth, heaven, wherever you are and however you are, is to drink deep of the water of ageless life.

I have now come to the point where I must go to humanity's purest teacher. We shall take our stand by the Son of Man, the human Christ, as He sits weary on the well of Samaria. Try for one moment to do this in reality. Here is Jesus treading life's dusty pathway, feeling as you and I often feel, knowing, as you and I know life with its trials, disappointments, sorrows, failures, its beginnings again; living through it all, never defeated by it. Here sits Jesus weary with the greatness of the way, like ourselves wanting human sympathy, and, as we so often are, refused. "Give me to drink," pleads the Son of Man; and the answer is dislike, prejudice, ignorance. Then the Divine remonstrance comes, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, Give Me to drink, thou wouldst have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water. Whoso drinketh of this water shall thirst again, but whoso drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst. But it shall be in him a well of water, springing up unto eternal life."

This was the water for which David thirsted when the poet-king uttered his longing cry for the water of the well of Bethlehem, he was looking back to the life of the child, but I think in his heart was the longing for the life of the saint. Can we feel as David must have felt at that time? Looking back along the road of life, what did he see? There is Shimei, flying, cursing him,

and throwing dust upon him as he walks with bowed and stricken head. Yonder in the wood hangs the body of his dearest loved son, who has lifted his hand against his father's throne and his father's life. Yonder, again, he sees Israel exulting, he hears the shout of his people going up in acclamation when the fearless shepherd boy comes from his seclusion to strike down Israel's tyrant. A proud moment, but David does not want that moment again. Now he sees in the hand of the great king, whom it is his privilege and duty to soothe, the poised javelin, ready to be thrown. Now he is fleeing for his life, hunted like a partridge on the hill; now his arms are round about Jonathan. And, again, Jonathan dead, Saul gone, David king—strong, unscrupulous, guilty, taking Bathsheba to his bosom, Uriah gasping his last at the front of the fighting-line, slain by the lust and the treachery of him who was after God's own heart. Now he seems to see again the sombre figure of the prophet of God entering into his presence in the midst of his splendour, pomp, and triumph—"Thou art the man!" and the voice of conscience re-echoed the voice of the prophet. "Oh," thinks the weary old king, drawing near to the end, "If I could but go back! Oh, for a drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem. Oh, for childhood's opportunity!" That is how some of us feel amidst the trivialities, absurdities, shams, meanness, violence of life. Are we not weary, would we not go back? But the true and deeper

thought is David's own. Would we not go *up*? Oh, if there be water of life, give me to drink! O Lord with the pierced hand, no mighty man can bring me that water, the draught of which means that I thirst not again. But there is One who fought His battle for me, and brings it to me, the crown of thorns upon His head, the mark of the lacerating spear in His side. With the pierced hand He gives that cup; Master from Thy hand we take it, the water of ageless life.

If this be true, and my whole life is built on it, and my whole task here springs from deepest sincerity concerning it, I want you to do something to-day, do it now. I address first, it may be, that young man who has been in London I know not how long, but long enough to learn the ways of sin. There are some things he wishes he had never looked upon, some words he had better never have heard, some deeds he had better never have done. Oh, cursed wisdom! Give me back my innocence! Here is another in whom the vexations, disappointments, crushing sorrows of life have succeeded in dulling the spiritual susceptibility. Such a one does not look up any more, the soul is silent towards God. You are no longer capable of high expectation or high enthusiasm. Again, look at that man who once was a success like King David in his heyday. This man of business was once a man of power, of influence, but in an evil moment success tempted him to that which in his conscience, he knew to be wrong! he

has been hurled down from his eminence, and life is a tragic failure for him to-day. His heart is full of bitterness and self-loathing. Yet for the moment he thinks, If I could begin again! Oh, for a drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem that is at the gate of manhood! How different it might be! Now listen to me. You are only a child still, everyone of you. You thought you had gone a long way from God, and so in experience you did. But the Father cared too much for you to allow you to do it with impunity. You have paid for your experience, sometimes in sharpest discipline, sometimes in deepest sorrow. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Pray your prayer like a child; there is no going back; God in His mercy has closed that door; the way is up.

> "We have passed age's icy caves
> And manhood's dark and tossing waves,
> And youth's smooth ocean, smiling to betray.
> Beyond the glassy gulfs we flee
> Of shadow-peopled infancy,
> Through death and birth to a diviner day."

Permit the paradox—some men by their sin open the gateway to saintship. Of course, that is not true as it stands, nothing ever is; but I will illustrate it. A dear friend of mine, a minister, speaking to me about the life history of one whom I knew almost as well as he, told me about a blot in that particular career. He said, "I have never known a man of greater promise, of greater natural endow-

ments; but he sinned one sin which the world will not forgive, and it seemed as if the door of useful service were slammed in his face. I think he has mourned every day of his life since in sackcloth and ashes, because of that one delirious moment when he sinned the sin which the world will not forgive, but perhaps upon which God looks with kinder eye." He added that the following question was put to him by one of those busybodies who try to keep a raw wound open. I loathe the very sight of them, and I think I am fairly tolerant; but there is one type of character I cannot endure, and that is the man who looks for the worst in his neighbour, keeps open the guilty record, and passes on the story, grim and dirty though it be. He came to my friend and said, "What do you think? You know So-and-So? Such-and-such happened in that year. I don't think you ought to be with him so much. What do you think about it?" "I think," was the reply, "that when he fell, God, by the exposure, by the swiftness of the chastisement that followed, gave him the opportunity of becoming a saint. He took it." Yes, brethren, it would be safest to take that way. We cannot go back to Bethlehem; we do not want to, but we can go forward, past Calvary to the eternal hills, and drink of the river of life. And the spirits and the saints say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come, And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

BURNING—UNCONSUMED

No one particular circumstance brought forth the following sermon. Rather it was suggested by a series of accumulated incidents; so many people came or wrote to me concerning the belittling effect of petty every day problems, limited horizons, galling domestic misfits, and uninspiring vocations. Meditating how best to help them, there came to me the thought that the source of disquiet in every instance lay in failure to discover the light of God in the common things of life. To grapple with even the most ordinary problems of existence a man must idealise his real. He who has eyes to see may behold what Moses saw—the splendour of God in the wayside task. It may not be out of place to state that God greatly blessed this sermon in helping many hearers to see amid their daily tasks the "light that never was on sea or land."

XII

"And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed."—Exodus iii. 2.

The event to which our text alludes is one of the greatest which has ever taken place in the history of mankind, although it seems so humble and so little noteworthy in itself. By this I mean that its effects, in accumulating sequence, have been profoundly significant and tremendous. No one requires to ask why. There are a few things in history upon which all civilisation, all human well-being, all possibility of moral advance, appear to turn, and this is one of them. It is no exaggeration to say that what we reverence most in our life to-day, the things by which we live and for which we would die, were locked up with Moses at Horeb on the day about which we have been reading. I am not inclined to dispute about the historicity of Moses and his work for Israel, and the account of himself that he has put into these pages, nor, indeed, whether he wrote them at all. The fact remains that there is just as much evidence for the historicity of Moses as there is for the historicity of Justinian, and we have good reason to believe that

the Jewish leader placed his mark deeper into the history of mankind than did the Roman Emperor. Let us try to understand how Moses came to be at Horeb, and what it was he saw. We cannot understand it without following in some detail the account of his life as it is given in this book.

The child of an enslaved people, his life saved by the devotion of a mother and sister, who hid him in the water in which babes of his own age and race had been thrown to be drowned: discovered by the daughter of the great King himself: brought up as a favourite at Court: learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians: regarded as the son of Pharaoh's daughter — here was a gentleman by training, outlook, environment, everything that the high civilisation of Egypt could give him at that day. But when he came to mature years he made a discovery. Those who had given him birth, those of his own kith and kin, the race in which he could discern his own lineaments, were lying under the oppressor's heel. The cry of Israel was going up continually to a seemingly deaf God. The lash of the taskmaster was present with them in all their daily toil, and their woe was an accumulating totality which Moses could not contemplate unmoved. So, as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us, the hour came when this man—for he was a man—"refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter." He belonged to the oppressed people, and with his own people he took his stand. He

did more than that. He had not been reared a slave, and, therefore, he was not able to behold without an attempt to remove it the oppression of those he loved. He slew an Egyptian to save a Hebrew, and then fled for his life.

How many years Moses spent in the wilderness we do not know; half a life-time it must have been. He was not a young man on the day of this vision which we read of in Exodus iii., but we may understand that all this time, away from the scenes of his youth, he had been brooding upon the wrongs of his own people, and wondering how he might save them. He had heard of Israel's God, because he was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. Israel did not know as much about Jehovah, perhaps, as he did; they had forgotten their Lord. Not so Moses. On this particular day, as he was leading his flock towards Horeb, it seems to him as though Israel's God has come to him, and spoken with him, and he hears the mandate from heaven: "Go back! save your people; lead them forth from the land of Egypt, and out of the house of bondage." He questioned within himself as to whether he had seen rightly and heard truly. "Who am I?—a poor shepherd of the wilderness, an exile, unprotected, unknown. Why, the people of Israel themselves will have forgotten me. Why should I heed? This may be an hallucination, and the voice itself the voice of my own consciousness: who am I to effect this great deliverance?" But the vision is still

there, and the voice he still hears, and presently, unquestioning, he obeys; and history, as I say, came to one of its turning-points as Moses moved back to the land of Egypt, whence he had fled. He goes to make a nation; he goes to revive, and, in a sense, to found, a religion; he goes—now we are looking a long way—that Britons might be born, that this congregation might worship here, that we should take upon our lips the name of Jesus. Such it was took place in that far-off day.

Now, I have no mind to say a single word which would rob this theme of any of its grandeur; my aim would rather be to help you to behold it in greater fulness. I am not sure that many of us are thinking of it rightly now. I can remember, for instance, as a child, as doubtless many of you can, when an illustrated book of Scripture stories was put into my hands; and I have fond recollections of that book, for I spent many happy hours over it. In it an attempt was made, in rough, inartistic fashion, to portray what Moses saw in the desert near to Horeb. A little shrub not much bigger than a gooseberry-bush was on fire; in the midst of it stood a shadowy form; before it knelt Moses, taking off his sandals. Looking back now, I can see a little the absurdity of the suggestion of the immature artist. But are you quite sure that you see any farther into the mystery even now than the artist of my youth-time saw? Let us see whether someone else has not. I have in my hands an excellent

and suggestive little book, "The Education of Christ," by Professor Ramsay, of the University of Aberdeen. The purpose of the book is to show that even Jesus must have been influenced in youth by the environment in which He was placed, to an enormous degree, and not least in that environment was the splendour, the magnificence of the scenery of the historic neighbourhood in which that youth was spent. On the mountain sides where Jesus climbed, Moses or the people of Moses themselves had stood; there had taken place some of the most famous events in the history of Israel. It was impossible, thinks Professor Ramsay, but that the very atmosphere of it all, the suggestions of it, the radiating influences thereof passed into the mind, the heart, and the very fibre of the mental constitution of Jesus of Nazareth. In working out this thesis, the Professor has a chapter on what he calls, "The Power of the Great Plains," and in it he quotes the following from a novel describing the American prairie. It is the experience of a cow-boy.

"Two days ago he was riding back, alone, in the afternoon, from an unsuccessful search after strayed horses, and suddenly, all in the lifting of a hoof, the weird prairies had gleamed into eerie life, had dropped the veil and spoken to him; while the breeze stopped, and the sun stood still for a flash in waiting for his answer. And he, his heart in a grip of ice, the frozen flesh a-crawl with terror upon his loosened bones, white-lipped and wide-eyed with frantic fear, uttered a yell of horror as he dashed the spurs into his panic-stricken horse, in a mad endeavour to escape from the Awful Presence that filled all earth and sky from edge to edge of vision.

Then, almost in the same fashion, the unearthly light died out of the dim prairie, the veil swept across into place again, and he managed to check his wild flight and look about him. It was as if his spirit stood apart from him, putting questions which he could not answer, and demanding judgment upon problems which he dare not reason out. Then he remembered what this thing was which had happened. The prairie had spoken to him, as, sooner or later, it spoke to most men that rode it. It was a something well known amongst them, but known without words, and, as by a subtle instinct, for no man who had experienced it ever spoke willingly about it afterwards. Only the man would be changed; some began to be more reckless, as if a dumb blasphemy rankled hidden in their breasts. Others, coming with greater strength, perhaps, to the ordeal, became quieter, looking squarely at any danger as they faced it, but continuing ahead as though quietly confident that nothing happened save as the gods ordained."

That is a powerful passage, and I make bold to say that I think I understand something of what was in the writer's mind; I think I may venture to affirm that some of you do also. There are at least two experiences in my life in which I can remember something similar. One was on this very American prairie, near to the Colorado mountains. I and my companion were alone in the observation car of an American railway train, riding away from the mountains, which rose like a craggy wall in the distance. There came on such a thunderstorm as we seldom or never see in Britain. There, before us, on the further side of the long stretch of prairie, was this spur of the Rocky mountains, Pike's Peak, towering above the rest. The great gorges seemed to be filled with flame, and round the top of

that mountain peak the lightning flamed like a crown of fiery thorns, every now and then thrusting down on to the prairie itself a sheet of flame—an avalanche, as it seemed, relentless, irresistible, making us to feel how puny we were, how great were the elementals in the midst of which we had been thrust. There was nothing common there; the prairie was just as it had been the day before, only that it was clothed with a new and sudden splendour, hidden in the heavens until that moment of vision. You will hardly need to be told that the effect upon us was a solemnising one; our leading thought was of the splendour of God.

My other experience was in South Africa. We were climbing in the night, also in a railway train, from the level plain around Cape Town up to that great table-land which is known as the Karoo. We seemed as though we had just reached the top when morning dawned. I drew aside the blind of my sleeping-carriage and looked out. There, stretching around us in every direction for hundreds of miles, was the flat plain of the veldt, studded with little bushes like the acacia that Moses saw, in the far distance rising the unclothed crags with the flat tops so characteristic of South Africa. But there was this addition. Not only was the solitude broken, but it was broken by a sudden splendour. The morning sun touched every thing into glory. You who live in Britain have little or no idea of the vividness of colour on these vast plains. The very rocks

were sporting crimson, and all the little shrubs were tinted with gold. It was a never-to-be-forgotten sight. Once again we fell silent; there was nothing to be said; we were in the presence of the real—it seemed as if all spake of the Eternal. Granted, we bring something to the vision; it might be possible for a man to herd cattle in the South African bush and never to see its glory; it might be possible for a man to climb the craggy sides of Pike's Peak and never again see the splendour of the moment I have described. The one grand message which our text contains for us resides in this: Moses saw something that day which he was fitted to see. We understand now something of what it was. Our text says really, not "a bush," but "*the* bush." He did not see a flaming gooseberry-bush, as it were; the whole landscape was lit up with the glory of the Lord upon whose name he had been brooding. The past history of his people fired him as he thought that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was not dead but alive; he felt his heart thrill and quiver. There was something for him to do; God was speaking, God was calling. He questioned with himself no longer; he turned in obedience to the heavenly vision granted in the desert.

The value of our text for you and me resides in the similarity of our experience with that of the great prophet. The divine is never absent from the soul of him who has eyes to see and a heart to feel the presence of the Eternal Real; every common bush

is afire with God, and every place is holy ground. The flame, the very flame that Moses saw in the desert at Horeb, is burning still and unconsumed.

The world is full of God, and not only so, but God calls His master men by the voice that speaks from the flame. A holy enthusiasm can see and hear what is hidden from selfishness and sin.

"Oh, we're sunk enough here, God knows!
But not quite so sunk that moments,
Sure, tho' seldom, are denied us,
When the spirit's true endowments
Stand out plainly from its false ones,
And apprise it, if pursuing
Or the right way or the wrong way,
To its triumph or undoing.

"There are flashes struck from midnights,
There are fire-flames noondays kindle,
Whereby piled-up honours perish,
Whereby swollen ambitions dwindle;
While just this or that poor impulse,
Which for once had played unstifled,
Seems the sole work of a life-time
That away the rest have trifled."

Yes, His holy flame for ever burns. There is nothing common or unclean, for we see shining upon it the light divine; and never do you see that light shining —the light that never was on sea or land—but from the midst of the flame there comes the call of God.

I think I know my congregation pretty well; it is like any other congregation in that it contains people of diverse yet similar experiences, now of sorrow,

now of joy, all of limitation—limitation which we seek at our best moments to transcend. The people to whom I am speaking are for the most part trained in the midst of petty ideas; but one and all of you are capable of wonderful things. There are here frivolous people, selfish people, worldly people, people who hardly ever pause to put two serious thoughts together. On the other hand, there are people here who have been stricken down by sorrow, who know the shadow as well as the sunshine, and far more of the shadow than of the shining. All of us, however, have our best moments, and in those moments we would, if we could, get past the limitation and into the glory and live worthier. Do I say wrong if I repeat, you are by virtue of those moments capable of wonderful things? The most commonplace, the most selfish, the most worldly-minded, might be changed, if he only saw in the desert what Moses saw, and heard on the plain the voice of God. Many times have I seen on the face of a commonplace man something that kindled into power. Have you not seen it? What is the cause of it? I take it that it is but the reflection of the vision that was seen at Horeb. It is when God speaks to a man's innermost being, when God has reached what is most like Himself in our nature, and we have responded, and heart and mind and countenance light up with it, that people cease to think of us as commonplace. Of that shining, which is as the glory

of the Shekinah we may know nothing ourselves; like Moses, we may not know that our face shines.

> "We are the children of splendour of flame,
> Of shuddering also, and tears:
> Magnificent out of the dust we came,
> And abject from the spheres."

God is not far from any one of us. I wish to particularise by choosing, as it were, two people from the congregation and speaking directly to them. It may strike you as odd that the first I choose is a woman. "Speaking about the great Law-giver of Israel, and then in the same breath comparing his experience and applying it to that of a woman, surely you have begun at the wrong end of things!" Not at all. I take the life of a woman for this reason. For the most part, in this land of ours—for we have not yet learned to do things right—the life of a woman is narrower and meaner than the life of a man—man's fault mostly, but there it is. I doubt not that in this congregation this morning there sits some woman full of possibilities for good, who came in here sad and heavy-hearted indeed. She has been beating her wings against the cage all her life; things have never come right to her, and she has felt, and she is right in feeling, that she was made for better than anything yet she has ever chanced to live. Even when marriage came, it may be, it was not liberty. Your life is spent amongst the humdrum, the commonplace, even the sordid; no liberty for the

soul. The things you once saw, as it were, on the cliff-tops of the morning you have had to try to forget, and yet you cannot forget; disappointment and heart-break have done their work. You entered the house of God to-day in the faint hope that some word might come to you, as it were, from the lips of God that should be somewhat of a compensation and a solace. Have I described your life aright? Well, now, listen to me. Take care what you seek when you come here to call upon the name of Jesus. Moses would have understood Jesus; that was why, and it was a very felicitous thing, Peter saw him standing beside Him on the mount of vision. Moses would have understood; perhaps you would not. Self-pity is the wrong mood in which to come near Calvary. The thought of escaping from things that hinder, of running away from the duty that seems to be cramping and repellent, getting peace by cessation of strife, is not the right thought to have when one comes into the presence of Jesus. Mind you, you are perfectly right when you feel that you are entitled to the satisfaction and the peace that you have never yet had. You are perfectly wrong if you feel that coming to Jesus means, as it were, a letting you off the things against which your soul is chafing. It will be quite the other way. The peace will come and the satisfaction be yours, but it will be when you have trampled down the lower nature and thrust it beneath you in the energies of your soul. God is speaking to you

out of the flame, but the message is: Back to Egypt, to the people that will not understand, to the people that will cry for the fleshpots when you have led them out; back to the sordid, narrow, commonplace; but see it in the light of Horeb, in all the splendour of God. Some women have done it who were as little likely as you are ever to see such a vision as that which Moses saw.

I brought into the pulpit with me this morning another book, from which I venture to quote. Most of us are familiar to some extent, at any rate, with the writings of Mark Rutherford. They are especially pleasing to me because they treat of common life and of very ordinary people. He does not idealise the characters of the people, but it seems as if he could turn on to them something of the light that shone into the desert of Horeb. He tells us, in that part of his Autobiography which he calls Mark Rutherford's Deliverance, of the dislike he felt for his little stepdaughter Marie. He could never understand the child. She was growing into womanhood without the barrier having once disappeared between her and him, until one day sorrow came to that home—bewildering, crushing, overwhelming sorrow—and he found he was unable to face it. In that mood, helpless, the man stood; forward came the child.

"What a change came over that child! I was amazed at her. All at once she seemed to have found what she was born to do. The key had been discovered which unlocked and revealed what

there was in her, of which hitherto I had been altogether unaware. . . . Faculties unsuspected grew almost to full height in a single day. . . . I remember once going to her cot in the night, as she lay asleep, and almost breaking my heart over her with remorse and thankfulness; remorse that I, with blundering stupidity, had judged her so superficially, and thankfulness that it had pleased God to present to me so much of His own divinest grace. . . . My love to Marie was love of God Himself as He is . . . because that revelation had clothed itself with a child's form. . . . I appeal, moreover, to Jesus Himself for justification. I had seen that kingdom of God through a little child."

But for the sordid, but for the commonplace, and but for the sorrow that shivered both, Mark Rutherford had never seen the soul of that woman-child. So it may be, so it is, with any woman, with any child, with any man, anywhere. God calls from the midst of the flame. He never summons you to what you are unequal to.

> "He who bids us forward go
> Cannot fail the way to show."

God has never asked what you cannot give, never set a task you cannot perform. Go back to your life; go back to the questions you have left, but go back with the enthusiasm of old Israel and this leader of men to nerve you. God is speaking from the midst of common things, but He is speaking from the things that flame, not merely from the things that repel. So Jesus calls to you, and will have the best from you. Believe that the best is yours to be and to do and to give.

Now I would speak of a man, with whom some of

you think I ought to have begun. It is a curious thing, but a fact, that the greater number of the men I see around me have not succeeded in life; by which I mean that their early enthusiasms have not been realised. As you grow toward midlife you feel you are disappointed—you are nobody in particular after all; you once thought you might be. As you have learned to be practical, you have learned to dethrone your ideal. It does not seem sensible for a man at midlife to talk as he would have talked when he stood on the threshold of manhood. But sometimes you wish that God had given you to do something worthy of that which you saw in your highest moments, in your enthusiastic days, the times when you could have given yourself for an ideal; but there is no stake at which to be burned, there is only a desk at which to be chained; there is no big heroic thing to be done; there is just the rent to get and the little mouths to feed, and it takes all your time and all your manhood to do that. You feel that the effect of your environment upon you is to shrivel you, and make you less a man than you once hoped to be. You have entered the house of God with some hope of being made contented with your lot, or at least forgetting it for a time. You are quite wrong about the mood, and you are quite wrong about the history. The biggest things in history are taking place out of sight, this one in Horeb amongst the rest. You never know the value of service in the light of

the Eternal; never call a human deed small or great until you stand on the other side of death and know as you are known. What we want nowadays is the fighting mystic. Young men, as a rule, are not mystics, though they think they are; it is the older men who come to know best of all that life is not what it seems, let alone all it seems. It is possible for a man when he has shed his ambitions to go back to the simple, holy mood of childhood. Moses was not a young man when he saw his vision and dreamed his dream; he was getting to be an old man, and it is an old man's vision that we are talking about. A strong man, but life behind him. He fought his battle in Egypt, and then thought it was over. He had buried the man he slew, and fled from the people he would have saved. Helpless and baffled, he stood alone in the wilderness, an old man, looking up and looking back. To him God came in the midst of the scrub, and the scrub seemed to light up, and the world seemed to expand, and the impossible became possible, and the unreal shone out real, vivid, true, something for Moses to do after all. He went back alone, an old man, and alone he did it, not a young man. God granted him vision of the highest.

You pray, "Give me comfort!" I will; that is comfort; it is not comfort on the low level, but comfort on the high level. "Give me inspiration!" I will; it is here. And what Moses saw in the flame and heard you may see and hear. You will be better

and happier for obedience to what you see in your best moments alone with God. Enter into the atonement of Christ yourself, become part of it. Wherever there is a wrong to be righted, Christ is at work; wherever there is a great deed to be done, if it is only at the fireside or in the counting-house, there is the call of God. Will you be one of God's master men? There is wondrous sweetness and power in the very thought. It needs not that you should be great, it only needs that you should be good.

> "I would not have the restless will that hurries to and fro,
> Seeking for some great thing to do or secret thing to know;
> I would be treated as a child, and guided where I go."

Behold, then, before you the bush, burning, unconsumed. Behold the splendour of God. The Lord has come to your little world like a flame of fire.

SIN'S SELF-DISCOVERY

The following sermon contains two illustrations from real life, but neither of them was more than an illustration. The purpose of the sermon was to reach one or two people whose moral history, had I been at liberty to state it, would have been a much more startling and emphatic testimony than anything I actually did say. The truth about one of these was as follows: On a previous Thursday a friend had brought to me a story concerning a family whom he expected to see in the City Temple on the following Sunday evening. He particularly wished me not to describe their circumstances too accurately for fear he or someone else should be suspected of having made me acquainted with the facts. I may remark in parenthesis that this often takes place: I outline a situation and state a moral question as I have met them in real life. Forthwith someone writes to say that he suspects I have heard something about him—as a rule I have never heard of him before.

This particular story was one of persistent, calculated cruelty on the part of an individual whose public character stood rather high. If ever a man was guilty of soul murder it was this eloquent denouncer of other people's sins. He had pronounced views on national morality, the wrongs of the Boers, and many other things. The vileness of his home conduct I verily believe he never stopped to think about. If he recognised himself in Nathan's denunciation he was careful never to say so. Of course he was not the only one present whom it was sought to reach by this gospel of self-revelation.

XIII

"And Nathan said unto David, Thou art the man."—2 Samuel xii. 7.

In this lurid sentence the prophet of God condemned the guilty king out of his own mouth. It was no mild utterance this, but one charged with moral passion and righteous anger. The circumstances called for the word, too. The wretched man upon the throne now saw, and for the first time, what his sin really was. No more dastardly act had ever stained David's life. It was the blackest of his reign—I mean the abduction of the wife of Uriah and the murder of her husband. It was guilt calculated upon and persisted in, guilt covered up even in David's own mind by sophistry and self-excuse. Now comes the moment of revelation, when the true state of things is declared to David's consciousness just as it had long ago been declared subconsciously, though he never dared to face the truth.

It can hardly be necessary that I should recount the circumstances. The king of Israel cast his lustful eyes upon another man's wife. In his unscrupulousness he planned the destruction of him who stood between his lust and its gratification. Uriah must be got out of the way, and in a very

base and wicked fashion the deed was done. Uriah was placed in the front of the fighting line and died with his face to the foe. The irony of the situation is that he died as an Israelitish soldier fighting for his country, and not improbably with the name of his king upon his lips and enthusiasm for David in his heart, charging the foe for the man who was his murderer. Doubtless David covered up the fact, which Uriah himself never knew, by saying to himself, "This man died a worthy death—why not he as well as any other soldier? I did not slay him, the enemy slew him. In all probability he would not have chosen another death if he were a true soldier and patriot. I am not guilty; therefore now what more natural than that I without reproach should take unto me Uriah's wife?"

Probably this was the way that David accounted for the deed to himself. Not so the prophet of the Lord. Israel was fortunate in that she possessed, and never was entirely without, one or two intrepid, fearless men of God, men of the pattern and stamp of Elijah, and such a one was Nathan.

Imagine the scene that is hinted at in this chapter rather than described. David, royal David, sits upon the throne in the day of his splendour, surrounded by his mighty men, and the plain-garbed figure of the prophet of God appears on the scene. He is made welcome—why should it not be so? This victorious king is the chosen of the Lord. What message can Nathan have to bring but a

message of good? The court is hushed to listen. The wisdom and righteousness of David respond eagerly to the demand of the prophet. Thus and such the rich man has done. Thus and such vengeance is called for, retribution to be awarded. What saith the king? "And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the Lord liveth (you see David is on the side of the Lord) the man that hath done this thing shall surely die. (David is the sword of the Lord.) And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing and because he had no pity."

Thus he voices his own condemnation, thus he seals his own doom. The court is silent, waiting for the prophet to speak. One sentence it is which issues from his lips, how terrible, only David knew, though the awe-stricken listeners must have felt, too, something of the impact of the tremendous utterance, "Thou art the man."

I cannot imagine that Nathan said these words with a shout. Rather he spoke them more quietly than David had blazed forth his ready anger. David on the seat of judgment passing sentence upon himself may speak eagerly and feverishly on the side of righteousness, "This man shall surely die." Said Nathan (he does not need to shriek): "Thou art the man—thou!"

Self-deception is never very difficult. Men are curiously averse to calling things by the right name.

There is no kind of hypocrisy so subtle and so dangerous as the hypocrisy which is hypocrite to itself and will not acknowledge its own presence. We can see transgression very plainly in the lives of others, but we are, as a rule, unwilling to face the truth concerning ourselves. But that truth will out, and in the light of God we have to face it whether we will or no. "Be sure your sin will find you out."

Such was the note of my theme this morning. For the benefit of those who were not present I will just give one point in the message. It was this:—Oftentimes God finds a way into a man's heart by breaking him, as it were, upon the wheel of misfortune. To some natures, at any rate, sorrow is the only means, the only instrument whereby God can make the highest felt. A man suffers what ostensibly he does not deserve, something unjust, something so far as the world is concerned utterly irremediable. That something must be God's message to him, God's means of uncovering the soul that He may address Himself thereto.

Two men came into the vestry after that sermon this morning. One followed upon the heels of the other. The first man, a gentleman in appearance, told me this striking story—shall I say gave me this striking piece of autobiography? "I am one man you were talking about this morning. I have suffered seven years' penal servitude for something I did not do, and which it is now known I did not do. You

can read the circumstances in the daily papers. They speak of making me amends. Of course you know nothing can ever make amends for the seven best years of my life. I did not deserve, from one point of view, as you rightly said, what came to me. But you were perfectly right in what you have said in that I deserved it in another sense. By that fiery discipline God woke my soul to life. I now know that the things which we can see and touch, the things commonplace and everyday, the things for which we spend ourselves, are not the real, are not the truest, are not the deepest, are not all. They are only the gateway into the eternal. I have found God. It was worth the seven years."

As he turned to go out, another man came in, from the north country, also a gentleman, a man of a certain education and standing and prosperity. If he be here to-night he will not mind, I am sure, what I am going to tell you, for it is by no means uncommon. He came to remind me of a boy whom years ago I knew, and he told me that somewhere that lad is in London, and if possible he would that I could find him, or if he ever comes to me that I will detain him with a message of love from his Lancashire home. He said, "We do not know where he is, and we feel that the truth were perhaps better hidden from us." The boy was educated to be a professional man. He never took his degree. His parents began to suspect, long, long before he left home for good, that something

was wrong. Sympathy ceased. He lived his life apart. He kept away from the ordinary, simple family altar which was erected every day in that home. His fellowship with his brothers and sisters, let alone with his father and mother, was severed. There was an absence of frankness. Something or other unaccountably was being kept back. You see, the false note had been sounded, the evil and hateful something had crept in, there was an element that had to be huddled away and kept out of sight. The inevitable hour came. He could no longer stay where he was. That home is mourning to-day because of a wandering lad. I wonder now if that young man could change places with the ex-convict about whom I have spoken, which of the two is to be the more pitied. God seems to have treated the one I named first far more sternly than he treated the other, for the prison walls have not closed upon this lad yet. But for all that I would venture to say that whereas the one man has gone out with a consciousness of self-respect, with a confidence in the eternal rightness of things, and with a vision of the meaning of life such as he never had till the chastisement came, this other man, this man who is the cause of a home affliction and a home scattering is in hell, that is where he is, though he walks the streets of London, or though he may be to-night in the house of the strange woman, laughing the loudest among his companions. That man is in hell, and he knows it. His sin has found him out,

the evil, sinister fate, has got a very tight grip. It matters little what the circumstances are. Of the two he is the one to be pitied, and his lot is the one to be dreaded. How little it matters what a man endures, how much it matters what a man is! "Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee, our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance." If that man had faced years ago what was coming and now is, if he had had the moral courage to turn right round, cost what it might, it would have been better for him than what is true of him now.

There are many present, no doubt, who can relate similar experiences concerning themselves or their loved ones. Out of a congregation as large as this it is safe to say perhaps thousands, two thousand it may be, have known or passed through a similar experience to the one I have touched on. Either you or that lad of yours, that friend, that wife, that husband, began to live a life apart from truth and right. Confidence was slipping away, some secret weakness was unconfessed, some evil entanglement was holding fast the soul in fetters. If only the right name were to be applied to the life that some of you are living or have been living, or the nearest and the dearest have lived or do live—if the right name were applied what would it be? Oftentimes it is too ugly to be applied. We can cheat ourselves as David did, that because the world knows nothing and because there is a euphemistic word to describe a foul thing, that therefore God is deceived

too. He is not, and heaven is not. The world of truth interpenetrates this, the world of glory is not a handbreadth off. You cannot hide from the eternal right. As Arthur Hugh Clough hath it in one of his most familiar lines, "Listen before I die, one word. In old times you called me pleasure; my name is guilt." What a dark name, what a foul name, what an unpronounceable shuddering word you would have to apply if you were honest, some of you, to the things you have been and the things you have done! God, you see, applies the right word — "Thou art the man." What in somebody else you would name unmistakably God has named in you. Often a man's degeneration is clear to all about him long before it is so to himself. He is ready to blame anyone in the world except the man most to blame—himself; and he can work up indignation against any form of evil not his own. I have known men who could write to the newspapers most eloquent letters of denunciation concerning some public wrong or some mistaken international policy. If these very men could have been followed to the fireside you would have been able to read a tale of misery in the face of their dear ones. And the men oftentimes who shriek the loudest at the delinquencies of some who are a sign for every man to point at dare not expose their own secret lives, the tale would be too squalid and too shameful. But, dear friends, God's moment comes, the dreadful moment of disillusionment for

every soul that has kept away from the truth. It may come soon or it may come late, but come it surely will. "Thou art the man."

Speaking this afternoon to Mr Badger about this subject, he handed me some lines that, curiously enough, had come into his own possession.

"Though no mortal e'er accused you,
Though no witness e'er confused you,
Though the darkness came and fell
Over even deeds of hell.

"Though no sign nor any token
Spoke of one commandment broken.
Though the world should praise and bless,
And love add the fond caress.

"Still your secret sin would find you,
Pass before your eyes to blind you,
Burn your heart with hidden shame,
Scar your cheek with guilty flame.

"Sin was never sinned in vain,
It could always count its slain,
You yourself must witness be,
To your own soul's treachery."

In God's economy, in God's moral world, the meaning of punishment is that the soul is compelled to see itself as it is, and to acknowledge the eternal justice. Come it soon or come it late, God's verdict upon sin is written large in the experience of the sinner.

If, my friends, I were to quit the subject here it might be enough for some of us, the one word

necessary for the vindication of the eternal moral order. But it would not be enough for some others. I could not help thinking, as I spoke, about the wretched man who never needed me to tell him a single word of what has been uttered up to this point. There may be a man here who could tell it to you in far more lurid and convincing terms than I have told you, because he has been living it. What must such a man have been thinking as I have spoken? Perhaps he may be feeling something of rising indignation against the speaker. "Where is the good of lacerating an open wound? Why remind me of what no earthly verdict can reverse? I must dree my own weird, I have made my bed and on it I must lie." A man can grow cynical, self-contemptuous and world-hating all in a breath by the remembrance of a fact like this.

Well, sir, it is to you that I most want to speak. You know—those at least who know me know—that I do not trifle with the facts of life and tell you that sin is done with as soon as you have tossed it in the air, so to speak, on the chance that it may reach the ears of God as a confession. It is not so. The way of transgressors is hard, but it is hard because of the mercy of God that is behind. "There is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared when Thou judgest."

I was reading recently in one of Maurice Maeterlinck's books, I think the last, a paragraph some-to this effect. Some of you here will feel that

what Maeterlinck has to say about certain of the deep things of the Gospel is hardly worth considering, yet you may be wrong. On this occasion, at any rate, this modern mystic reached the Gospel truth by a roundabout road. This is what he says —I do not quote, I only paraphrase—If a man hath done a guilty deed, if a man hath been betrayed by himself, dragged down by evil propensity, and hath the courage and the faith to rise again, the day comes, the moment is his when he can say, It was not I that did it.

Of course you see the paradox of the mystic. Yes, but it was a truth stated in paradox. A man may so rise above the habitual level of his own character that deeds are forgotten. It is not so much the deeds that matter, it is the climate of the soul, it is the moral atmosphere in which you live that is telling out the truth. A man's real fall often antedates by long the fall that the world can see and judge him by. But, look you, if a man has risen so far by virtue of his penitence that he reaches the heart of God; so exalting himself by true humility that he is no longer capable of that old sin, it is, as it were, blotted out of the book of remembrance. To such a man I would be entitled to say in the name of the Lord of Hosts, "Thou art *not* the man," the man that was, but another, redeemed, purified, made holy by the Spirit of God.

There are some people who are morbid in their

introspection and their view of their own moral delinquencies. To such people I would speak a word of warning. Remorse is not repentance. Morbidness is by no means humility. There is another way and a higher. If there be one man here who feels that his life is blackened by his own misdoing, I entreat him to pause and consider this mighty truth. It is impossible for you to contend with God. Once you have realised that there is no longer need for you to remain in the prison-house. If any man is hopeless concerning the past I call him to a deeper as well as a higher life. An old mediæval mystic once wrote, "In every man there is a godly will which never consented to sin nor ever shall." You know what that signifies. It tells you that the deepest self in every man is Christ. What? Yes, I mean it. Until conscience is dead Christ is not gone from the soul of any man, but that Christ you may be crucifying; and as the preacher to-night I have just the same duty as the Roman Governor performed in an earlier day when, half cynically, half pityingly, he brought out the Christ and set Him before the mob, "Behold the Man!" the man that you are crucifying in your self-loathings, in your self-despisings, in your hatred of the world and its temptations and its delusions, crucifying the Christ within you by staying down in the bondage of sin. Greater is your sin in the rejection of the redemption of the Most High, it may be, than the sin which plunged you into your self-

despair. Listen to the voice that comes from farthest heaven, "I will blot out as a cloud thy transgressions and as a thick cloud thy sins." "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." There is a great mystery here and I am content to leave it so. God speaks through the voice of conscience, the self-accuser, the one that no man can escape, no man can avoid, no man can delude. "Thou art the man." Say, then, to the Father, "I have sinned against heaven and before Thee." Then hast thou found thyself, thou hast come back to God ere the words are uttered, and the Father's word to thee is this word of forgiveness and mercy and tender love. Rise, thou child of the holiest, though in the deepest of depths thou hast plunged thyself and sunken thy soul, for God the Father pitieth His children, God the Saviour redeemeth His own. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

A CAKE OF BARLEY BREAD

It may be interesting to some readers to know that the individuals for whose sake this sermon was preached are described in the application. Moreover, they recognised it, and came to tell me so. It is a simple, although somewhat exceptional theme, but I never remember to have experienced greater blessing both in and after the service. This was God's timely word for a number of those who worshipped with us that morning.

XIV

"Behold I dreamed a dream, and, lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell." —Judges vii. 13.

This is a somewhat remarkable text, and that not merely on account of its quaintness, but of the vast field of spiritual suggestiveness which it opens to us. The phrase, "a cake of barley bread," may not at first sight appear to mean much, but it covers a whole chapter in a brave and strenuous life. Here we have a tiny nation oppressed by powerful neighbours. They are not a great people. Although they have been known in history as the Chosen People, they are few in number, apparently are weak in character, they have just fallen under the dominion and worship of the obscene god Baal. Jehovah appears to have deserted them. They would not have their Father's God, so He has left them to their own. They have been reduced to extremity. They have been maltreated by the oppressors, and at this, the darkest moment in the fortunes of Israel, a deliverer arises, not from among the leaders of the people, nor from those who stand in high places, but as has often been the case in history, from the lower ranks themselves.

Gideon is the hero in question, a man of the

same stature and quality as Wallace and William Tell. He begins by questioning with himself how long the worship of Baal, with its immoral, degrading and obscene rites, was to be tolerated in Israel. Someone must have the courage to speak and to do something more than speak, someone must have the intrepidity to act. And Gideon thinks it may as well be he as anyone else. So one morning credulous, self-indulgent Israel rises to see the god Baal hurled from his pedestal and helpless to avenge the affront. Their first thought is to revenge it for him. They would have slain Gideon but for the intervention of his father. "If Baal is injured, and if Baal is worthy to be worshipped, let Baal, and Baal alone, revenge the injury. Hold ye your peace." So Gideon earned the name of Jerubaal, the antagonist of this hitherto powerful deity. His next step is to consider whether Israel, won back to the purer worship of Jehovah, might not be delivered from the sword of the oppressor. Who is to do this? The Amalekites and the Midianites are as the sand of the sea for multitude, and Israel but a handful, and a handful of slaves at that. But, his resolution once taken, this man, questioning within himself, arrives at the conclusion that he himself is the chosen of the Lord to do the work. How often he hesitates, like Moses and like most of the Israelitish prophets, leaders, captains, judges! He is self-distrustful. He puts the Lord first to one test and then to another. He is not free

from the superstitions of his time, and who knows but "there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy." Even the test of the fleece may have been honoured to this man's good and his people's salvation. Finally, with three hundred men at his back he decided to strike the first blow.

But on the very eve of the conflict he hesitates once more. How real it all is! because it was taking place within, and not without the man, this discussion and this presentation of opposite conditions. How real it all is! He goes down to listen and to spy within the camp of Midian itself and he hears one man tell his fellow a dream. The dream is almost in the words of our text. A cake of barley bread tumbles into the camp of Midian, and smites a tent, and it falls and lies ruined before it. Gideon returns without a word. He takes it as a symbol, a sign that he, the chosen of the Lord, is already victor in the counsels of the Most High, and his decision and his act were one and the same. To his little band he exclaims, "Arise, the Lord has delivered the host of Midian into our hand."

Why "a cake of barley bread?" Why did this hero attach so much importance to this symbol? First, it was the symbol of poverty. Israel had been reduced to this coarse fare, and was not obtaining enough of that. Perhaps the enemy taunted them with it. This was all they had left, the food of the beasts of the field—"a cake of

barley bread." It was the symbol of weakness—the cake of bread against the tent of the Midianitish general. It was the symbol of obscurity—Gideon himself was as a cake of barley bread, a labouring man called to be the instrument of God for the deliverance of his country.

Now let me tell you why I think this piece of human history is so interesting and helpful. It is because what is here related took place, for the most part, in Gideon's mind, and he had no more to help him to a decision than you and I have in similar issues. The moment you bring in an unnecessary supernaturalism, that moment you destroy the value of any biblical narrative; you push away from you the man whose life ought to be an inspiration for you. There is a supernaturalism in this narrative just the same as there is in yours, of the same kind, and perhaps in the same degree. I am not one of those who try to read out of every event the supernatural element. I would rather read it in all round. God's wonders have not stopped since Old Testament days, and there is just the same kind of supernaturalism in your life and mine as there was in Gideon's at this time.

We have here a case in which a man with nothing to aid him but his sense of God and right, essayed a seemingly hopeless task, and accomplished it. No one else was even willing to try. Such men are rare in history, but they have always been forthcoming when God wanted them.

In the political history of mankind there are not a few such characters. I have already named two. William Wallace, a simple gentleman, saved Scotland at a time when her nobles and even the man who should have been her king ceased to believe in her freedom and her destiny. Some of them had joined the enemy. Hope was extinguished. Few cared. "A cake of barley bread." William Tell was something more than a legendary character, probably, too. A Swiss peasant made history when, in spite of all obstacles and in defiance of all precedents, he snatched from the jaws of the mightiest empire of the world the little republic which exists to-day in the very heart of Europe. Benjamin Franklin, a humble labouring man, anticipated Mr Chamberlain by long years in his pleading with the inhabitants of this country, with its crown and with its government, not to thrust aside its imperial destiny. He strove to avert the fate of his country —shall I say, he strove to avert the separation of his country from the motherland? He failed, so he proceeded to make a nation on the other side. Out of Benjamin Franklin's brain, to a large extent, the American Constitution and the American Republic sprang. A labouring man—"a cake of barley bread"—a maker of history. Joan of Arc—one name suggests another—a peasant girl, a victim of French selfishness and English tyranny, but to-day the patron saint of her country—"a cake of barley bread."

In the religious world, in religious history, the

facts are even more instructive—Francis of Assisi, a friendless youth, expelled from his father's house without so much as clothes to cover him, the regenerator of Christendom; Savonarola, a preaching friar, unarmed, defenceless, pitted against the mightiest system the world had ever seen, and up to a point, though it cost him his life, a victor and the harbinger of victory; John Wycliffe, a poor scholar, "the morning star of the Reformation," when princes and great nobles, not to speak of the common people, dared not to raise their voice against the iniquities of Rome; Martin Luther, the simple monk of Wittenberg, who tore half Christendom away from the See of St Peter; Hugh Latimer, an English yeoman, Reformation bishop and martyr for all time; John Wesley, the son of a clergyman, himself a clergyman of the Church of England, too poor, sometimes, to pay his way almost, but the author of the greatest revival of modern times, whose followers have belted the globe with the story of the gospel, was even refused a hearing in the Church he loved so well—"a cake of barley bread" against an army.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon—some people here are old enough to remember when he was nicknamed "The Essex Bumpkin"—this man was the apostle of the nineteenth century. An uneducated American, D. L. Moody, reduced so low that at one time, though there was no fear of him going under, it was with him an anxiety how to make ends meet, how to carve out for himself a career. When success

did come it was laid aside—five thousand dollars a year given up to do God's work, and that alone. "A cake of barley bread"; but he awoke the English-speaking world with the story of the love of God. How true are the words of the apostle in my second lesson of this morning. "For you see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

To us, looking back on these achievements, it seems as though the people I have named could never have had a doubt or a tremor. But it was not so. Like Gideon, they questioned and hesitated, just as you and I do, until the decisive moment came, and a moral purpose was formed and carried into effect.

I have in the pulpit here with me this morning a copy of the Literary Supplement of the *Times* of last Friday. There is a passage in it to which I

would wish to direct your attention. It is well worth it. In an able review of a book about the "Saints of England," the writer says:—

"Even to purely scientific minds the subject of the saints—of those men and women who, having been born in this world, have renounced at some period in their history the usual fashions of the world, and in consequence have received from contemporaries, or posterity, an enduring record of their renunciation—is one of extreme interest, as it has ever been of vital importance to mystics and members of the Church. Canonization is rarer nowadays a great deal than it was in the Middle Ages. Strong souls of passionate, humane and spiritual intention live grinding on in our material midst with hair shirts infinitely more cruel than any of the Middle Ages bound about their worn and exhausted bodies. They are often the mothers and fathers of many children, fearless, if weary, toilers in a wilderness of sodden city streets; sometimes they are the sons and daughters of almost unendurable family circles. And there are even more remarkable and unrecognised saints than these—saints who drive in motor-cars and wear their eyeballs out beneath the blaze of electric light in drawing-rooms; social saints, these last, 'playing the game' in the face of disease, disgrace, and ruin, for the sake of some family tradition, some purely worldly hope for child or brother; that very 'game of life' upon which the saints so persistently, joyously, and—may we say it?—with such self-satisfaction were wont to turn their backs, and thereby win into their memories the 'eternal' halos of mankind."

Just so, had we eyes to see it, as the writer of the article has. How true it is to say that God's purposes are being worked out. God's battles are being fought in obscure places, but as surely and as really, and in God's eyes with as much value, as any of those that have taken place on the great field of history.

Here before me this morning, I doubt not, though

perhaps they have never thought of it, are some who are the chosen of the Lord as much as Gideon, Luther, Wesley, Moody, only you were chosen for the day of small things. Is your vocation of any less value on that account? Not in the least. You stand now as plainly outlined before the gaze of God and heaven as ever stood a John Wycliffe or a Martin Luther when fronting the inquisitors and persecutors of old. You are fighting as great a battle as Gideon fought, as true a battle, and in the purpose of God it may be as worthy a conflict as ever he carried to a successful issue.

Here are God's "cakes of barley bread." Let me speak to one or two of you personally. You see that man of humble parts, concerning whom the world knows but little, but whose lot in life has already been so strenuous and so hard. This man is a member of a scattered family, gathered perhaps into many households. He was just the member of the family from whom least was expected when he was young. He has had to carve his way alone, and to do it against odds. He had no particular chance given him; no particular pride was ever shown in him. But now—now that his grip and strength of character, now that his singleness of purpose and honesty of aim have been crowned with a moderate amount of success, that man has the burden of the rest loaded upon him. How often that occurs in human history. Life is not easy for anyone of you. It is full of care and tragedy, perhaps, for many who

are here just now. Such a man as I have now described is one of God's "cakes of barley bread." There is nothing very interesting about him. No one would ever dream of describing him as remarkable, but here he is, carrying not only double, but more than double the load he need carry if it were not that he had other lives to think of as well as his own, so many weak wills to strengthen. He is always called to rescue in the moment of stress, and forgotten the moment it is over. Is it any wonder that he shrinks from the conflict and avers that he has had enough? But he always goes back, and always takes up the burden again, and always strikes his blow for a brother's good. Ungrateful Israel is saved by him—why? Because he has realised down in the depths of his heart this is his duty. He cannot let father or brother go down, so he is the man that they ought to be, this Gideon of modern times, playing the game in the obscure corner, one of God's "cakes of barley bread."

Now turn your eyes toward the quiet little woman who has come to church alone. Her husband knows too much to worship God on the Sabbath day; he has outgrown it. This little woman knows in all its fulness the problem of poverty, anxiety, struggle, home sorrow. She has married a man in whom she finds it difficult to believe now as she did on the day she espoused him. But she tries to do it, and keeps a brave face to the world, and will never confess that she married one who was weak, but who

appeared to be strong. If ever trouble comes to this family, it is the wife who bears it, not the husband, who says he does. Here is one who has not only to face the crisis when her husband lies down before it, but she has to keep up his spirits too, and renew the dying hope within him. She does not tell the world, and the world does not care, though perhaps the world would give the man what it thinks he deserves. This woman is neither beautiful nor brilliant. She will attract no attention in company. There is nothing showy about the part she plays; but what will be the outcome? I know. Her children shall rise up and call her blessed. The truth will out sometime where it most matters to be told. It is known now, if she could only see it, in high heaven and in the presence of the angels who are strong and pure, and whose strength and whose purity are shown in their sympathy with these struggling ones of earth. Ministering spirit below, you have a kinship with those ministering spirits above! God knows the task that was set, and how it is being done. "A cake of barley bread," a single arm against a host, a brave battle with the inevitable end. God's ways shall triumph, and triumph in you. Hold on, for as sure as you are here this morning so surely has God called you to the work that you are doing, and to the victory you shall win. Turn back to the task you have left with the full assurance that so it is and so it must ever be.

Now just let your thoughts turn to this boy and girl, for they are little more, who have come to church to-day to receive strength and inspiration for an almost impossible task to-morrow. The father has been taken away by the hand of death. The poor mother is not able to cope with the world, not able to think what to do or what measures to take to keep the old home together. So this boy and girl have to be father and mother to their own mother and to the rest—and I am painting no imaginary picture. I know it to be true. They are not versed in the ways of the world, so they are cheated and they are wronged and they are oppressed. They are the losers, mostly, when the conflict comes with the hard, practised man of affairs. Now and then they find a friend, but they are learning, even so young, not to put much trust in human promises; they hold good as long as they do not pinch the person who makes them. It is a hard task. Sometimes they feel as if it ought not to have been set them. Yet these are only tempted for the moment to shrink from what God has sent them to do. To-morrow it will be all right again. Back to the front! God's "cakes of barley bread" thrown against a host, victory granted and assured! Gideon looked just like any other Israelite, and amongst the people here this morning it would puzzle you to pick out the men who are playing the game as I have described it. Within as many minutes I sometimes talk to two or three men and

try to figure out what might be if circumstances changed with anyone of them. One man comes with his complaint of the hardness of fortune, the inexplicableness of fate, and excuses himself for having failed and gone down. Another comes, tells you nothing about it, but you know he has to begin again just where he started years ago, because of the mischance which has overtaken him, and which he never did anything to deserve. What a difference in the two men! I know if I put this latter man down in the midst of a great city, or in the wilds of Africa, he is not going under. He carries his credentials in his character. Usually the secret of a man's failure, though he knows it not, is not to be sought in any external circumstances whatever but in himself, and a man's success before it comes is guaranteed by the quality of his brain and heart.

> "Whose armour is his honest thought,
> And simple trust his utmost skill!"

Shall I tell you where to find the secret of invincible courage—intense unselfishness? Look up the record of the men of faith. Have you a great task before you to do to-morrow? In what spirit do you propose to attempt it? Have you a duty for God? With what resource will you face it? Do you ask—it is very natural that you should—why all this? Why am I expected to do this work and bear that extremity of fortune? What hope of success when I have done it? "A cake of barley

bread" against an army. Yet rise up, children of God. Christ is with you, nay, Christ comes again in you to a fresh encounter with the host of evil. Our first hymn this morning is a glorious comment on this text:—

> "Oh, wisest love! that flesh and blood,
> Which did in Adam fail,
> Should strive afresh against their foe—
> Should strive and should prevail."

Where am I to look for my Christ? In heaven? Well, yes, in heaven. When we see Him face to face we shall know something of what we have owed to Him all the way. But here is the place for the saint to look for Him now. Look within your own heart and you will find Him there. All that is best in you is Christ. The Christ divine indwells every one of you, you unrecognised saints of God. It is His work that you do; His spirit which prompted it, and His victory that you are to win. Only "a cake of barley bread"; only a frail hand and a single arm; only a trembling, fearful heart, but yonder the mighty work and here, at hand, within, the Lord of Hosts!

A SINFUL GOD

The following subject was chosen as a result of conversations with a number of pessimistically inclined people, whose questions involved the venerable problem treated in the Greek tragedies, and the Book of Job. In the choice of title and text I made an attempt to bring Christian experience to bear upon a problem to which mere speculation is unequal. The issue was sharply stated—too sharply to be at once understood by some people who were present. *Vide* the postscript which follows the sermon.

I may remark that one of these conversationalists was Mr Hall Caine, whose forthcoming book, "The Prodigal Son," treats the same theme.

XV

"We make Him a liar."—1 John i. 10.

The title I have given to our subject is, I admit, a strange, almost an irreverent, one, but our text justifies the phrase if only to force an issue upon our consciences. It is no trifling alternative with which the writer of this chapter arrests our attention by the use of this startling phrase. He places in bold relief what is the half-comprehended feeling of many whose thoughts and lives are in direct opposition to that view of the nature of God which came to us in Jesus Christ. "If we say that we have not sinned we make Him a liar"—there is no help for it. If the moral attitude of the man of the world is the true and wise one, be he hedonist, pessimist, or materialist, then God Himself must be a sinner, and the universe is a lie.

Before going further, let us be sure that we have grasped the writer's meaning. The word "liar," as employed in this text, sounds to English ears a very strong epithet; it has an offensive and even a contemptuous significance. If you or I were to employ the term in addressing or describing anyone in our circle of acquaintance, we should expect it to be resented. But the offensive and contemptuous

significance is not necessarily present in this passage. It really means the essential falseness of all existence. It could be employed even of an unconscious God. Suppose you imagined that the power behind phenomena is utterly unconscious of itself, and that a good man crushed by irresistible fate was destroyed by a God that did not know it when He did it, you might feel and say: The universe is false to my conscience; conscience has bidden me do right—I have been destroyed by doing it: and this blind, deaf, and dumb God of mine did not know. But is it not immeasurably worse if you can bring yourself to feel and say that the God behind all, after all, knows perfectly well what He is doing, knows you and all about you, but is utterly indifferent as to what happens to you when you have served His immediate purpose; you may suffer, but He cares not; you may die, He has done with you; good and evil, right and wrong, joy and sorrow are all one to Him? "He plants His footsteps in the sea, and rides upon the storm." What could such atoms as you say to the Judge of all the earth, a Judge to whom right and wrong matter equally nothing? As John Stuart Mill says: We would arraign such a God—we could not help it—before the tribunal of our own consciences, and we should say: One thing at least He cannot do, He cannot compel me to worship Him, and if He sends me to hell for such a refusal, then to hell I will go. That quiet pessimist of centuries ago uttered almost a twentieth-

century sentiment about such an extremity when he wrote:—

> "We are none other than a moving row
> Of magic shadow-shapes, that come and go
> Round with the sun-illumined lantern held
> In midnight by the Master of the show."

Here then is an issue which the writer of our text forces upon us. If the man who is seeking to follow the right that is written and proclaimed within his own conscience find no correspondence with the voice of that conscience in the world outside him, then the universe is a lie. It behoves this generation to ponder well the declaration contained in these words, and every one of us must, whether he likes or not, take up some attitude towards them. To the man of indifferent life who feels he is obeying the law of the universe by living a bad life, I have a question to put, or, rather, I would like him to put it to himself: Is God a liar, or am I? Let me illustrate. I doubt not I address some who feel the terrible pressure of the burden of the world's woe. Who has not done so at some time or other? And who is himself so steeped in self-satisfaction as not to feel one pang of sympathetic sorrow for those less fortunately placed than myself? We may feel the pressure of the problem through our sympathy with agonising humankind, or through our own self-pity. Going out into my garden one morning to listen to the song of the birds, I found in one bush a little nest full of tiny mites all dead, and I could

not for the life of me understand why; I knew that no one in my house would do such a cruel thing as take away the mother of those little ones. Presently I discovered the reason. Hanging by her feet in the garden net was the little songster whose home that tiny nest was. She had been seeking food for her little ones, and had been caught there and slowly destroyed. My imagination conjured up the scene that must have taken a good while to enact—the slow death, the longing to be free, the starving progeny, the seeming sinister cruelty of it all. No philosopher that has ever lived, any more than the weakest, smallest child, is able to give a full and satisfactory answer to the question. Why? There was epitomised the story of sentient life in the world, and in face of that tiny tragedy, I sent up my question to the Lord of the universe, and felt for the moment as if I stood upon one side and He upon another, and as though there were in humanity an element of pity which he Himself lacked, though the power was all His. At our young men's meeting last Thursday the veteran philanthropist who addressed it said, "I am sometimes glad I do not live in London. I almost think it would unman me; there is the apparently hopeless sorrow of the great sunken masses of London to account for. There seems to be so little done and such a cry of agony rising from the abyss, that I feel if I were amongst it, in the presence of it, it would break my heart." I know

what Dr Paton meant, as most of you do. It is, as we read in our first lesson (Job ii.), that evil is stalking to and fro in the earth, and walking up and down in it, and God tolerates it—nay, it may be, ordains it.

Yet there once stood amongst us a Being who had a verdict to pronounce, and, though he gave no full explanation, He said this concerning the great problem which you and I are now facing: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing, and not one of them falls to the ground without your Father. Behold the fowls of the air; they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and God feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" This same Jesus—whom some people have accused of looking too lightly upon the great problem of the woe of the world, who, as He watched the sparrow die at the same moment, uttered the word "Father" in conjunction with the tiny tragedy—this Jesus went to a cross for His faith; human hands nailed Him there. If there ever was a vision about the meaning of the universe and of the nature of God, Jesus had it, but it did not save Him from the Cross. He uttered no complaint against God, and His last word was a word of pity for man. But this Jesus who thus spoke about the love of the Father for His children paid for it surely in His own life; the dichotomy went straight through His experience. We feel the desperate antinomy in the experience of Christ as we feel it nowhere else. These con-

tradictions in experience are to some natures appalling; we feel as though harmony were impossible. Some of us feel at times as if we are living two lives—one in which we are as Jesus, and the other in which we have to conform to the world's evil standard. This is the doctrine of Positivism—humanity on one side, nature on the other. Humanity can be considered as one, so can God; but the real God, the hard God, the masterful God, is upon the other side, and identified with the soulless world.

I was reading in a book called "Love and Hunger" which came to me the other day a statement of this dichotomy which probably the writer did not mean to make. He describes a working man sitting by the bedside of his little child; he has been out of work weeks and months. The doctor has told him his child may be saved if he can give her good food and take her away to the seaside, and so on. The man cannot get the food to give the child; the comforts are impossible, the seaside—you might as well speak of heaven. The man grows desperate as he sits there and watches her slipping away from him into the unseen. Within a few hours of the time when death has done his last and worst, the work is granted. The man feels no gratitude to anybody; it comes too late. But at the very hour when the child is taken from him he must go out to earn his daily bread; there she lies still on the bed, and here is he, pushing trucks about a goods yard. There is the problem epitomised—the two lives, the

one at the bedside, love that would have given itself in extremest sacrifice to save the little one; the other conforming to that hard and terrible law. He had to labour and he had to suffer.

Even greater is the question as affects the distribution of God's judgments. Now and then a man comes to me and pours out his saddening tale as to the way in which God has judged righteous judgment concerning him; he has sinned against the light, and righteousness has been terribly vindicated in his life. But for one such man there are twenty men who never come. "The wicked flourish like a green bay tree." Here is a scheming monster with whom everything has gone well to all appearances since he began his lying career; why should that harpy be tolerated in the ranks of humanity any more than a bird of prey? It may be I address one who is helpless in the face of intolerable wrong inflicted by such a hand; which of you has the better footing in life, you with your conscience or this man with none—he who has been raking riches to himself ever since he began to think? That is a question as between your conscience and your God. A friend showed to me some months ago a newspaper paragraph which concerned one of us. Putting it down on the table, he said, "When you consider that pungent, lying, loathsome statement, which only just avoids the law of libel, what is your first thought concerning the writer?" I read the paragraph without a tremor of emotion, without any feeling either of

indignation or respect. I said, "Well, the man who wrote it probably had his bread to earn, and sold his soul in doing it." "Precisely," said my friend; "but he must have thought it would pay him to do it; he must have thought the world would give him a chance if he did it; therefore, this expresses his philosophy of life. He would lie away another man's career, he would stab to death another man's peace, he would not give the treachery two thoughts after he had done it; but he must believe somehow that the world is so made that it will let him do this, and the world's God is of such a kind as to approve it, otherwise it never would have been done."

You see what I am trying to bring out. Conscience, even at its best, sometimes feels the terrible dissonance between good and evil, between the ideal and the real, and conscience at its worst acts as if the real were the evil, and as though it would pay to do that which is wrong, rather than to do that which is right. Men must believe it, or they would not persist in sin; nay, they might even deny that there is such a thing as sin. When you see a man giving his life to shame and wrong you are tempted to believe that the law of the universe is the survival of the fittest—go on if you can, carve your way, for you must, nature will not spare you; believe that the law of the universe requires you not to know anything about sin, not to be squeamish about wrong; take things as they come, keep your

footing, live your life. If so, the universe is worse than a tragedy, it finds a place for the victorious lie; good and evil it is equally indifferent to, right and wrong, peace and pain are confused together. What shall we say, then, of those who try to live another kind of life than this, but that if the man of the world has the best of it, if the hedonist comes off conqueror, if the materialist philosophy is the very truth, and God is blind and deaf and dumb, or worse, then the universe is a lie.

Here, then, is the issue before us. Many of you, without facing things out, are living as though the question were already settled for you. If evil is stronger than good, then you are entitled to call even conscience a liar; if there is nothing to vindicate the righteous man, then God Himself is the aider and abettor of sin, and is justly condemned by the very thing that has been held to reveal Him. Nay, if good has usually been on the cross, and evil on the throne, then even Jesus Christ, the Being of clearest moral vision that the world has ever known, was also the blindest and the most deluded, and those who have loved and followed and suffered and died for Him are of all men the most miserable and the greatest fools. I intentionally put the case pungently. Here it stands then: Jesus Christ on the one side and the god of the materialist and the hedonist upon the other. If the man of the world is right, and piety a failure, then Christ is a mistake, and those who follow Him are worse.

But stay: there are two things I would like to bring before your attention. First, supposing it were possible to imagine God being on one side and right on the other; *better perish with the right than succeed with such a God.* We will put it that way. Perhaps you think I am saying something new, but centuries before Jesus walked on earth a man worked out that problem; nor is it merely in the book of Job. A Greek tragedian represents Prometheus hurled from heaven and chained to a rock by the king of the gods because he chose a right that was greater than Zeus. This god could not conquer; he crushed him, but the victim had the victory after all. Prometheus chained to the rock appealed to eternal right against enthronéd wrong. How like that is to the story of the mediæval worshipper, who, when told that the gospel of Christ was only the story of the world's greatest tragedy, that not good, but evil, gained the victory, answered: "Then I had rather be in hell with Christ than in heaven without Him." This is the ultimatum of conscience. If the universe had a sinister meaning, and a devil were at the heart of it, better perish with Prometheus chained to the rock—better die with Jesus on the cross—than succeed by obeying the sinister will of such a god.

But here is the second consideration. Thousands have done this very thing, and pronounced this very ultimatum. Men have followed the prompting of their highest nature with this astonishing and sub-

lime result: *they have come to feel absolutely certain that conscience told them no lie, but that omnipotent God is righteousness, truth, and love.* I am afraid that some will miss my meaning here. It is that when Calvary became the only issue out of an impossible situation, when good and evil were so pitted against each other that the good had to suffer, evil had to triumph, that the decision for the highest taken not only by the Christ, but by all who followed and loved Him, has led to victory after all. It is a sublime fact that this has meant the discovery that the great God is righteousness, truth, and love—a God that will by no means clear the guilty. "The Lord executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed." "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life." Ponder this well, all you whose lives are so ordered as to "make Him a liar." Can you stand in the judgment, not the judgment that is afar off, but the judgment that ever proceeds? Your life is registering its own decrees. Is evil gain or loss? Were it well to serve it or defy it? I ask you to appeal to the experience of the man of faith in any age. At that meeting last Thursday to which I have already referred one of our deacons spoke and gave us this piece of experience; it arrested my attention instanter—in fact, I may say this sermon

came out of it:—He said it had often struck him as an appalling thing that young men of his acquaintance were sometimes willing and ready to avow that the determination to get on meant the sacrifice of moral principle. They would speak in this way: "The world is so ordered to-day that the man who would succeed must have money—money I must have! The man who has none is thought little of to-day; therefore I mean to get it. If it is wealth that leads to power, and wealth that spells success, I cannot afford to be without it. I will get it, honestly if I can; but if I cannot, still I will get it." This, said my deacon, struck him as being a ghastly sign of the times—that a man should so present the alternative to himself and so decide. He was not speaking from imagination, but from what he knows well. There are men who, whether they confess it or not, have deliberately made this choice, which I should call a pact with the forces of evil.

You see what such a man says to himself. It is not a question of sin. He would not acknowledge its existence; sin can only be recognised when righteousness is enthroned. Righteousness may not vindicate itself at once, but a man will not acknowledge his sin who is obeying what he calls the law of the universe, a necessity imposed upon all flesh. He says: "You must live, you must succeed if you can; you cannot afford to be squeamish. Do not parade your sympathy; this world is not a place for

sentiment. Get on, honestly if you can, but get on anyhow; and when the time comes when you must turn to the left and win success, or turn to the right and become a failure, do not fear or hesitate to go to the left." You see what you have done; you would not acknowledge it, but the word "sin" has no entrance here or any stake at all. Be it so. You have taken your choice; you have "made Him a liar," and, not only so, but all the experience of saints and martyrs since time began. You have taken your stand with a sorry crew—those who prevail for the moment, but to-morrow are dismissed in ignominy from before the face of God.

You, then, who dread life, who are tired of it and suffer under it, have you been to Christ with your trouble, with your problem? Has He laid His healing touch upon you? Have you anything to yield up to Him? Then fear nothing else. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar." If He cannot keep you in peace and safety once you have chosen Him, then, in the language of our text, He is a liar; but can He—does He? Let the redeemed of the Lord say so whom He has delivered out of the hands of the enemy. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all." "Sorrow endureth for a night, joy cometh in the morning." This, then, is the meaning of life. I am glad that God has

made it no child's play; there is many a twentieth-century Job who has had to face these issues and come through, walking by faith—the faith that never loses grip of the hand of righteousness. It is the righteous man who knows that God is true. "There hath not failed one word of all His good promise." I have no fear or hesitation in stating this alternative: Either God is a liar, evil man, or you are; either righteousness is the last word of the universe, and is one with the love of the All-Father, or else your life is at one with the law of evil. But if the Cross of Calvary is really the way to the throne of His glory, you are condemned even now. But you who have served truth and suffered for it, you who have been nailed on a cross of your own for trying feebly and in a corner to serve the same great law of righteousness, you who have come to Christ, turning your back upon evil as you turned your face to Him, you need have no fear: "Yea, let God be true and every man a liar." When the heart of a righteous man speaks true, it knows Him to be the Father and Redeemer of us all. But beware, ye workers of iniquity. "Turn ye, why will ye die?" The life that is raised against God is foredoomed. His righteousness will dash it to pieces like the potter's clay.

A Question Answered

Before announcing his text on Sunday evening Mr Campbell said:—

"Someone who appears to have been present at the service this morning has sent in to me the following question, to be answered if possible from the pulpit to-night. I could hardly undertake to answer in the pulpit every question that comes to me, but as this arrives so soon after my teaching of this morning I think it is well worth a word.

"'Will Mr Campbell kindly explain why the power to do evil is greater than the power to do good; or, in other words, why evil is stronger or more powerful than God?'

"The answer to the question is that evil is not stronger or more powerful than God, though it may often seem to be so. Even human experience at its highest is a constant denial of any such pessimistic creed. There are men here to-night, I do not doubt, who feel in their hearts, and sometimes say with their lips, that this is a world in which it is easier to do wrong than to do right. To the flesh it may be, but there is something within every man which in the very moment of his sin informs him of a larger and a purer and a higher life, and in so doing calls him towards it and condemns him for failing. Every person here must admit that. Moreover, in my teaching this morning I tried to show to you by two parallel statements what Christian experience has to say upon this point. Supposing, as in the Greek tragedy, you are, like Prometheus, chained to the rock for having dared to do right, having given yourself to a noble cause and suffered defeat

thereby ; supposing, I say, that the universe was so made that you had to be chained to the rock, like Prometheus, or nailed upon the Cross of Christ, better go, then, and suffer in defiance of an evil god than succeed by obeying a sinister law. There is something in the human heart which says, 'Better be crucified with Christ, if that were the very last word that the universe ever uttered, than obey a god whose name and nature are wrong.'

"But, secondly, the very men who have done this are the men who have discovered for us and written large upon the skies of time the truth that to him who suffers for the good there enters the confidence that God is good. The men who have gone to the stake for right, the men who have been tortured for the sake of truth, the men who have been heroic in the world's great affairs, defying bad humanity itself for the sake of something which is eternal, have by that very process and that very experience become convinced of the fact that omnipotence was upon their side after all. God and righteousness and truth and love are one, and the men who have gone to Calvary in that belief have not doubted that it was so. And it will be so for every man in this place who dares to venture his life and his career upon it to-morrow. You will not be allowed to live and to die without the consciousness that you are on the side of God."

THE AGNOSTICISM OF JESUS

It often falls to my lot to have to reason with young men who are agnostically inclined. When such a young man is unteachable I leave him alone, feeling certain that time will modify his self-confidence; but if along with his agnosticism there goes a wish to render obedience to the best, there are many ways of helping him. This sermon was designed to show that not only is humanity compelled to be agnostic—in the literal meaning of the term—concerning by far the greater number of the questions that even a child can ask about the universe, but that this ignorance of ours has a certain moral value; it gives us an opportunity for noble living amid things the full meaning of which we see not. This is the way in which character is made. It startled some of my young men to be told that in this sense I was not only an agnostic myself, but that every Christian must be, and that even the Christian's Lord was not exempt from the reality of this experience. It is so often and so freely asserted that our blessed Lord had no mysteries to face, that He is made to seem an unreal and unhelpful Being to men of this generation who are trying to follow Him. The mistaken abuse I received for this sermon, from good people who never saw the point of it, was more than balanced by the good work it did among my own young men. It made Jesus real to them, and taught them to see that a man's worth consists in the way he deals with that corner of his life in which there is no room for doubt, and no excuse to be agnostic.

XVI

"But of that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father."—Mark xiii. 32.

If one were in search of a text with which to testify to the genuineness of the Gospel narrative he could not select a better than this one. It is, indeed, remarkable, in regard to early Christian records as a whole, that the further we get away from apostolic times the less simple and credible are the accounts of the various writers. When we compare the gospels with sub-apostolic narratives of what profess to be incidents in the life of Jesus we are struck by the naturalness and spontaneity of the former as against the turgidness and miracle-mongering of the latter. The gospels are probable from their very simplicity, just as the sub-apostolic records are largely improbable because they lack that quality. In the gospels Jesus appears as a simple yet sublimely impressive figure, while in sub-apostolic literature He is anything but that. This text, then, is one of many which do something to establish the genuineness of the Gospel records; for in sub-apostolic times it would have been added to or explained away. Here in St Mark's Gospel it stands just as Jesus spoke it, and apparently the

utterance is meant as an acknowledgment of His ignorance of some things.

There is in many quarters to-day a tendency like that of sub-apostolic times, a reluctance to admit that our Lord could be ignorant of anything. People who hold that view fail to see that in so doing they destroy the humanity of Jesus, and therefore His value for us. What avail His struggle and sorrow if He knew all about their meaning, and why they came, and the issue thereof? His life and work would be unreal if we could compel ourselves to believe that. No; as He here Himself asserts, His consciousness of His destiny and His mission was limited. In many things Jesus was the Child of His time, and I will mention some of them. For one thing, there is no reason for us to believe that Jesus thought anything other than that Moses wrote the Pentateuch from the first chapter to the last, and that all the other authors of the Old Testament books were as traditionally described and named. I remember once, in Oxford days, hearing a popular preacher, who came to the University city with the special object of overthrowing, as he called it, or attempting to overthrow, the work of one Biblical scholar of eminence —Canon Driver—and the way he proposed to do it was this: "Jesus said Moses wrote the Levitical code; therefore he did write it, otherwise our Lord is not what He professed to be, and our Lord is not divine." The good man was perfectly genuine

and perfectly sincere, but, as you can see for yourselves, his argument was not necessarily sound—far from it. For, on our Lord's own showing, there were some things He did not know; and this may, with all reasonableness, have been one of them. Who wrote the Pentateuch or who wrote the Psalms was not the question that Jesus came to settle, nor the information that Jesus came to give; neither should it ever be, in the life of any rational man, or of any Christian, a question of primary importance. The questions of primary importance lie deeper than that, deeper than the authenticity of this or that book, but not deeper than the great moral facts of our being. The Lord hath written His law within our hearts. What Jesus came to reveal no man stands in doubt of who looks at the life of Jesus and tries to conform himself to it.

Further, Jesus was a Child of the time, in all probability, in that He assigned causes for disease which we do not assign to-day. Epilepsy, for example, was believed by everybody in His time and among His countrymen to be demon-possession. It may have been—there is nothing asserted to the contrary—that Jesus thought so too. Again, there is no reason to think that He knew all the facts concerning the structure of the physical universe. It is marvellous how He avoided error concerning these things; but there is no indication that Jesus foresaw the astronomical discoveries of a later day, nor did He give any hint

that He thought about them. In political history the knowledge of Jesus appears to have been confined to His own people and to the influence of Rome upon them. He never foresaw England; He never said a word about the British Empire. He never seems to have looked much further than His own generation, as the chapter that we read for our lesson (Mark xiii.) shows. Yet, in the providence of God, England has had a place to fill in the world relatively as great as that of Rome, and her mission is not terminated yet. Lastly, Jesus was the Child of His time, in that He not only anticipated a speedy end of the world, but that it would be of a cataclysmal character: hence our text. "This generation," He says in the context, "shall not pass till all these things be done." It is common knowledge that the Christian Church in general in the first age expected a speedy coming of the Messiah and a speedy end of the world. But Jesus did not come as was expected. The end of the world is not yet. Every week some fresh prophet professes to find from certain portents the exact date when this earth and the heavens are to be dissolved and the elements melted with fervent heat; but so many have been their false alarms, so numerous their disappointments, that I think we may take it for granted that the end will not come quite so soon as any person in this generation believes, any more than it came in the generation to which Jesus belonged. But I say it is clear

from this chapter that Jesus Himself anticipated the end sooner than the facts have shown to be the case.

But all this only serves to bring Him very near to us, without dimming in the slightest the beauty of His spiritual vision or diminishing one iota His moral pre-eminence. It only showed that Jesus possessed no dual consciousness. He could not be at once finite and infinite—Himself and somebody else. He was Jesus. He brought to us the manhood of God, and everyone of you who is trying to live the life of Jesus in the spirit and strength of Jesus is showing forth the same thing. For God is not something apart from humanity. He is humanity, and infinitely more. All that God was in humanity, that Jesus was, and is. He consistently represented humanity at its highest, and thus showed it to be in its essence divine.

"Follow you the Star that lights a desert pathway, yours and mine.
Forward, till you see the highest Human Nature is divine."

We may, therefore, with reverence, regard this text as illustrating the agnosticism of Jesus.

Agnosticism was a word, coined, I believe, by the late Professor Huxley, to express a certain mental attitude towards questions insoluble at present by the human intellect, but with which religion professes to deal. I do not mention the term with any intention of attacking it—far from

it. I believe it has done a necessary work. Indeed, I would like to show that there are some things upon which young men can afford to be agnostic, and some upon which every man must be agnostic, and for that we have our Lord's own warrant. It was the late Mr Herbert Spencer who, in his "First Principles," defined the basis of agnosticism thus: "The power behind phenomena is utterly inscrutable." There are people here who do not think that proposition ought to pass unchallenged. Yet "God's ways are in the sea." The Christian could say that, and is so far an agnostic. "Canst thou by searching find out God?" The answer is, No. But this Jesus of whom I have been speaking addressed Himself directly to the power behind the phenomena, as though He knew something concerning it. He said: "I thank Thee, O Father, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and understanding, and hast revealed them unto babes." The power behind phenomena, if it is to be revealed at all, must be revealed to a certain quality of heart rather than to a certain quality of mind. This quality of heart Jesus exhibited at its fullest and best, and you and I may partake of it. There are some things that we can come to know concerning our being, and our destiny, and our place in the heart of God, although we may be in the dark about all things else.

No doubt I address not a few who are in the particular mental mood which has conventionally

been called agnosticism. In a congregation so large as this, containing so many young men, it is impossible to suppose that every person accepts the orthodox and conventional view of the person of Jesus and the doctrines of Christianity. You do nothing of the kind. I do not think any the worse of you if you have faced your difficulties fairly and bravely. In your case, in all probability, what you call agnosticism simply means a sort of religious uncertainty. "How do you know?" would be the question you would address to me if I were to make any very definite assertion concerning God, human destiny, immortality. "Prove your case." Now, I want to show that we are all, more or less, compelled to assume your present attitude, only, whereas you take it about the deepest things, some of us have come to see that we cannot afford to take it about those things, and that experience justifies us in taking a more confident, more optimistic attitude toward the great questions of human life. Thus, we are all compelled to be agnostics, of a kind and up to a certain point—I am not afraid of the word. Men were agnostics before the word was coined, but they did not know they were. I would like to show you that your value as a man depends upon the quality of your agnosticism; your merit before God depends upon whether you are an agnostic in the sense that Jesus would approve or whether you are not.

You remember, probably, the story of the con-

version of King Edwin of Northumbria. It was a long time before Huxley's days, but there was some agnosticism taught by a statesman in King Edwin's wooden hall when the missionaries of Augustine came to the northern capital and waited before the Saxon monarch and his lords. At first they were inclined to repudiate him and his doctrines. At last one of the council arose and spoke thus: "Thou knowest, O King, that oftentimes on a winter evening, when we are assembled within this dimly lighted hall to do the business of our people, a swallow will come in from the night and pass through the hall and out at the further door—from darkness into darkness again. So it is with the human soul. We come we know not whence; we go we know not whither. If, therefore, these new teachers can tell us aught concerning whence we come and whither we go, let us hear them." Great events proceed from small causes. It may have been in the providence of God that that speech that night had something to do with your Christianity and mine to-day. Yet we are just in the same position intellectually as that Saxon speaker was who stood before King Edwin concerning the same questions that he raised. He was an agnostic, though he did not use the word. So are we, and yet we may be Christians notwithstanding. Do we know whence we come? Some preach reincarnation, but most of us would brush aside the suggestion that we have ever lived before. Whether we brush it

aside or not, we cannot prove either yea or nay; we have to hold our judgment in suspense in a question of that kind. The question first to be settled is, what to do with our destiny while we are here, how to prepare for the destiny that awaits us. Can you tell whither you go? Not a few in this congregation are not at all sure that there is any life beyond the grave. They wish it could be proven. So do I. But we can do no more than infer it from the moral constitution of the universe. If to-morrow you could fling wide open the portals of the unseen, you would not necessarily make better one man on the whole globe; rather, you would probably give opportunity for the formation of some syndicate to exploit it. You would make no man, necessarily, feel that he must be a better man, a nobler man, than he was before. Here, then, we stand just in the position of the Saxon lord who advised King Edwin that we know not whence we come, and we know not for certain, in the fashion of scientific truth, whither we go. We can but fall back on the position of Tennyson, which is the position of every Christian too, and say:—

> "My own dim life should teach me this,
> That life shall live for evermore,
> Else earth is darkness at the core,
> And dust and ashes all that is."

Human nature refuses to believe that grim alternative. The moral argument for immortality is the only one that is much worth while. We are

agnostic, then—compelled to be agnostic—in the sense, that we cannot *prove*, by demonstration, that there is either heaven or hell.

Again, we are agnostic concerning the staggering problem of the existence of evil. By evil I mean both sin and suffering. As I came down to the church to-night I saw the newspaper placards about the battle which has been raging for days in the far East, and is not over yet. This is what the headlines said:—

RUSSIAN ROUT

HORRIBLE CARNAGE

RIVERS CHOKED WITH DEAD

If you will allow your imagination to rest upon those phrases for a moment, and to translate you to the scene where those events are taking place, you will have a problem to which no philosopher has ever yet been equal. In its presence everyone has to hold his judgment in suspense. He can give no opinion as to the why and the wherefore of these things in a world which is said to be ruled by divine love, the governance of which is righteousness. But two days ago I read in the newspaper something that would touch some of us British people more nearly still. A young couple, father and mother, were putting their only two children to bed. One of them, a little fellow, leaping

out of his father's arms at the top of the stairs, fell to the bottom, and was killed. His mother rushed from where she was bathing the baby to the spot where the tragical fall took place, and, in her agony, casting herself upon her baby boy, forgot the other. When she returned the poor little mite was drowned. I see you feel just as I felt when I read that. There is something inexplicable there. None of us can see any possible good in a discipline of that kind—a horrible, crushing calamity. Poor father! Poor mother! They must be sufficient for each other to-night, for the veil has dropped—dropped from the hand of death—not only between them and their children, but between them and their God. On a larger scale similar tragedies are taking place everywhere. It may be questioned whether there is anything more tragic than the bereavement caused by the shattering of the bonds of love. It is just because we are made capable of affection that pain can strike so deep. Who can answer the problem which is raised thus? None of us. You can but stand silent in the presence of that awful fact to which all flesh is heir.

Outside of this church there is a murder going on somewhere. You will see it told in the papers to-morrow. Have you an answer for the problem of human depravity? Nay, you need not go outside the church. Stay here. What burdens have been brought into this place? What awful resolves, it may be, have been taken by some worshipper ere he

entered the door! What anguish and distress of mind, what a poignant experience is someone's who has come to rest for a little while in the company of his fellows and to try and forget! Oh the horrible pit and the miry clay! You are very quiet as I speak. Some of you, the youngest of you, have learned to be quiet in the presence of some of the dread things of life; for, young as you are, it may be hope is gone and you are of those whose lot is cast—

> "With those who watch but work no more,
> Who gaze on life but live no more."

Do you know the meaning of it all? I do not. Sometimes I think I can lift a corner of the curtain. There is one thing—one thing only—which gives hope in the midst of trial, and it is the experience of the Saviour. He knows, even in sight of the Cross and in spite of the shame, yea, in the midst of the agony, and in face of the tomb, that it is well with him who suffers for righteousness. The word has been spoken from the unseen to the deepest in His own soul. There has been nothing noble but its price was paid in pain; there has been no manhood worthy of the name but it was born in the furnace.

Were this all, it would be poor comfort, even then; but I must take you further with One who had a higher vision than mine. These things were not hidden from the Great Agnostic in Whose name we are gathered. What had Jesus to say about them? Almost nothing at all. Nothing?

—nothing about whence we came and whither we go? nothing about meaningless agony? nothing about human depravity, and the cause thereof, and the end thereof?—nothing? No; nothing that would be evidence in the laboratory, but much that is evidence to conscience. Jesus never raised the question of the goodness of God; He took that for granted, and lived His life accordingly. Jesus took for granted the essential rightness of God's doing. His pure soul reflected the Father's love, and the Cross could not destroy His faith in it. Jesus never discussed whether a man had lived before or should live again. Of Himself He said, "Before Abraham was, I am." To those who drew near to Him He assumed the eternal destiny of every soul, and it is to pure and holy lives that the same revelation is made to-day. It is not necessarily the people who have suffered most that are the most faithless. Now and then you meet a man who has been turned bitter by his woe; now and then you meet a lonely soul who has lost faith in the kindness of the Father because she has been robbed of love. But I think I can say that those I have known who have suffered most, upon whom God has laid the heaviest burden, who have had sorrow heaped on sorrow, agony added to agony, till Nature could bear no more, have not uncommonly been those who stood nearest to the heart of Christ, those who have gazed most trustfully into the Father's face. There is a phenomenon

for you: the person who lives the Christ-like life in the atmosphere of loving trust, somehow, in spite of the agony—my phrase is not strong enough—even because of the agony, transforms the Cross into a crown of glory. The sufferers know not the meaning of what they have to endure. "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because Thou didst it." Yet listen to the affirmation of the man of faith: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." What kind of man does that kind of agnosticism make? I challenge you to tell me whether Huxley's kind has done better. Has it done as well?

Now, before I close—I see my time is gone, and I have not said half I wanted to say to these young men before me, to whom my heart goes out in brotherly sympathy—before I close, I leave this with you. It is no begging of the question or dodging of the issue. That I say I know. Agnostic you must be, but not all the way round. There are some things you do know, even if no preacher ever uttered them, and no man of science considered them. What kind of life are you living amid the issues that you clearly understand? In the business where you get your living you will meet with men who are systematic liars, scheming for their own ends. You say, "It is a bad social system, but we cannot help it; business is business. In the present it is nothing better than barbarism. We are longing, yearning for a better day, 'when

men shall brothers be' in the market as they are at the fireside; but at the present there must be falsity, hypocrisy, suspicion." Don't believe it. The social order will never change until some have been crucified—it may be you are one amongst the number. You dealt with a man yesterday who would lie his soul away to gain a sovereign. You know he will get the better of you by sharp practice if he cannot by fair. The motto of many a successful man of business is not better than this: "Get there, fairly if you can, but get there." You have your place to make, and to keep when you make it. Well, now, if I were to say to that man who yesterday got the better of you, and whose whole policy and maxim and order of life are just what he treated you to yesterday, "I know something better for you," and I preached unto him Christ as Paul would have done it, he might laugh in my face. "All very well," he would say, "perhaps there never was a Jesus." Well, I might manage to answer that. I could prove the historicity of Jesus as easily as I could prove that of Lord Palmerston, and the evidence is just as good. "Prove then, that He said what is written in the gospels." Very well; I am willing to accept that challenge, too, for if "Jesus" did not speak the message attributed to Him, the man who did is my Christ. "Then prove that He lives." I cannot. He is worthy to live; He is worthy to reign; and the life that is lived along that line is a triumphant life, and the man who has come to that ideal never

finds fault with his destiny, however hard it may be. He sees but a little way; but that is enough. These are not the men who have shrunk from arduous issues nor strenuous conflicts; look history through, and you will see them among the highest and the noblest of the sons of men. Agnostics, but agnostics like the author of the hymn who wrote:—

> "Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
> The distant scene; one step enough for me."

Agnostics, if you like, about nineteen-twentieths of the facts of life; but about the remaining twentieth no compromise with conscience. Again, can you afford to be agnostic concerning, let me say it, the worth of womanly purity—your sister, your mother, the woman whom you hope to make your wife? Give a logical reason, a scientific reason; we will have it that way. Why should you feel the blush of shame on your cheek and the mounting of indignation to your face if you hear a man say a word about these sacred names which would tend to diminish your reverence for them and the respect which is their due? Why is it? You will have to go deeper than scalpels and microscopes can take you to find that. It is written deep down in your heart by the finger of God. He was there to write it Himself. It was from the divine that that sentiment sprang.

Listen, then, you who are trying to live your life without Christ, who confess yourselves to be

without a working faith. You are not quite so bereft as you thought. Can you go no further? Can you afford to be a liar? Can you afford to be unclean? Agnostic in a good many things, you will pause before you are agnostic concerning the things of truth and purity and right, the noblest manhood. And when next your scoffer says, "Who knows whether there be a Christ and a heaven?" answer thus: "Are you taking the way to find out?" "He that willeth to do the will of My Father which is in heaven, he shall know of the teaching." Live like a man, a true man and a brave, in the region where you cannot afford to be agnostic. You will find that region is a little larger by the time we meet again.

> "Power was with him in the night,
> Which makes the darkness and the light,
> And dwells not in the light alone."

Listen, my friends and brothers! I am taking you back to Jesus again. He was agnostic, just as you have to be, about some of the most obtrusive things of life. Jesus could no more have answered some of the questions I have mentioned to you than you can answer them yourself. What will take place within the next five minutes of your life? I do not know. What will be the next word the preacher shall speak? You do not know. What is there waiting for you—black or golden fate—to-morrow? I do not know;

you do not know. Is it death? is it life? is it sorrow? is it joy? We do not know. We are agnostics in these things and things like them, but so was Jesus. But, as a saint of God sang just before he went out to death—

> "I know not what awaits me,
> God kindly veils mine eyes."

I rest upon the eternal purpose. It is well with those who put their trust in Him, well with those who seek to walk uprightly. The man who is living a pure life in the things of every day does know something then about the meaning of life and its call to him. Though it be shrouded in mystery, it "means intensely and means good"; and to face it as Jesus faced it, and live it as Jesus lived it, means that the things we know by being true and faithful enable us to wait the revelation of the rest without darkness or dread. "I *know* whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." "We *know* that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose."

ONENESS WITH GOD

This sermon was asked for by some of the young men who had been helped and set thinking by the previous one on the Agnosticism of Jesus. It speaks for itself.

XVII

"I and My Father are one."—St John x. 30.

These words of Jesus are in a sense a summary of the Fourth Gospel. This is what the gospel is about, and the text is the reason why it was written. The writer himself tells us so. "These things are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing, ye might have life through His name." What is chiefly remarkable about the words of our text is that nearly everyone who hears them thinks he knows what they mean, and yet their simplest interpretation is not the one that is usually put upon them first. It is strange, too, that the meaning which constitutes their chiefest value is the one that is usually passed over.

What, then, are we to say this sentence does mean? I put the question to you, and no doubt you are answering it mentally, somewhat in anticipation of what is to follow. What can they mean? One might say, when Jesus declared, "I and My Father are one," He affirms an eternal fact, for He Himself is the Eternal Son of the Eternal Father, the express image of God, or, as the Shorter Catechism has it, "There are three persons in the Godhead; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost;

and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory." Or, as an even better-known creed has it, "There are not three incomprehensibles . . . but one." I say everybody, or nearly everybody, on hearing the words of our text, would at once give, in conventional language, in the language of someone else and written ages ago, some such explanation of its meaning. Do you think we have made it clear when we have used all these words about it? We have done the very opposite. We have wrapped it up in symbols, but we have not come to close quarters with it and gripped it. There is nothing more certain than that Jesus employed these words, not in their metaphysical sense, but in their moral sense. It is true they cannot have a moral without a metaphysical meaning, but it is the moral meaning upon which Jesus laid stress, and I do not think that those who heard Him mistook His meaning. He took pains to show just what it was. It is strange, indeed, that the context of this sentence is so seldom quoted. "Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If He called them gods unto whom the word of God came, and the Scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of Him, whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God? If I do not the Works of My Father, believe Me not." These are the evidences of My oneness with Him.

If I may venture to paraphrase the sacred text, I

should say His remonstrance in every-day English meant something like this. "Why are you so surprised? Why so angry that I have said, 'I and My Father are one?' If all the prophets, if all the royal men of history, if all the noble ones of earth have deserved to have applied to them this phrase, I said, 'Ye are gods,' do you not think that I, by My very credentials, have some right to use the phrase likewise? If they are gods, I do not say even so much." For Jesus never in so many words said, "I am God." If we have affirmed it, and we cannot help it, it was not because He claimed it, it was because men read Him, His credentials were clear by what He was. They confirmed His utterance. "I and My Father are one." I say it is strange that the context is never quoted, for by this assertion Jesus claimed divinity for manhood.

Still further, He asserted that everything that was good witnessed for human oneness in God. "If any royal men deserved the title Godlike, then," said Jesus, "surely I may claim, if I do always the things which please Him, oneness with My Father." All discussion as to His metaphysical status is beside the mark. His credentials were in the purity and nobleness of His character and work. He said well, "For which of these works do you stone Me?" He was and is one with the Father in spirit and purpose, heart and will.

You will observe that I have left a question undiscussed, the pre-existence of Christ I have not

mentioned; His lordship, other than in the moral sense, I have not touched. Jesus may have been from all eternity at the right hand of God. He never thrust that fact upon His hearers, but what He did press upon their attention and seek to enforce by the lesson of His life was this—humanity is meant to rest in the bosom of God. It should be true of all men, and He came to help to make it true, that they could say, as He said, "I and My Father are one." Learn, then, that the reason why these words were ever spoken was to lead mankind to realise its oneness with God. For this we were created, and to this we must attain. When we shall see Jesus, as I trust we shall all see Him, face to face, we shall never ask the question, the thought will not occur to us whether He is man or God. The absurdity of the inquiry by that time will be clear. No such question, I say, will occur to us. No creed will rise to our lips. It is just as true of heaven to say there shall be no creed there as to say there shall be no night there. Creed will have become experience, and faith will have become sight. It is related, I think of Charles Lamb (I speak subject to correction), that, in company with some others, when the person of Christ and His status in the ranks of humanity was under consideration, Lamb spoke thus —"If any of the worthies of antiquity, a Socrates, a Shakespeare, a Luther, were to enter this room, we should all stand, but if that Other came, we should all kneel." You feel, without my having to add one

rhetorical word, the irresistible, invincible truth of that assertion. If Jesus Christ stood where I stand now—and I verily believe He does—and our eyes were opened to see Him, the King in His beauty, not a scoffer in this Church would curl his lip in the presence of the Son of God. For since that day when the Jews took up stones to stone Him, humanity has come to know what Christ really was, and the riddle they could not read, and the glory they could not see, and the moral grandeur to which they were not susceptible, are revealed plainly to the gaze of all men. It now knows what Jesus was, and the question of His metaphysical origin and the question of His status in the Godhead never would have been debated if it had not been for His moral value to mankind. For the present, then, His value to us is that in Him we can see what God is. To all eternity you and I may be growing in the knowledge of God's ways, you will never have to grow any wiser in the knowledge of God's heart once you have seen Jesus. We know Him now for what He is. We realise the goodness of the Father in the transparency of the character of the Christ. And still more—have you ever realised it?—it is a creed that is worth your while—to all eternity you will never find that God the Father is any better than was the earthly Jesus. That is the value of the Christ, and what He came to reveal, and our souls respond to it now with earnestness and humility—His oneness with God in heart, in purpose, mind, and will. "He that hath seen Me

hath seen the Father." "I and My Father are one."

This, I say, is to be your destiny too. God and humanity are one. God is infinitely more, but He has never withdrawn from your life, or else there would be no life at all. Some day the will of which you boast yourself now, the freedom that you enjoy and misuse, will be gone, for if you have learned Christ, all your goodness will be spontaneous, you will not pause to consider or even struggle before you do the right, and when you have done it there will be no question of your will and God's will. It will all be His. Glad freedom when will is dead! When sin is done away and time shall be no more, men will no longer talk about humanity and divinity; but God, heaven, mankind will be at one, and you shall say, even as Christ has been teaching you to say, "I and my Father are one."

As I was on my way to Africa, I heard a little fellow pestering his mother to tell him when he would see the sea. She was pointing it out to him, "There is the sea, my child, there is the sea, all around the ship." That did not satisfy the little man. Pointing with his finger, now north, now south, now east, now west, he kept on asking, "Is that the sea, is that the sea, mamma?" And her answer was invariably, with the patience of motherhood, "Yes, that is the sea." The puzzled expression on the little fellow's face told me what was in his mind. To him that was only water, and he

wondered when the point would come when that which was distinctively the sea, the unfamiliar compared with that with which he had been familiar all his life, would come into his vision. He could not see the ocean for the water. There is an old saying that sometimes we cannot see the wood for the trees. The little child who picks a daisy may need to be reminded that it is a flower. Is it a daisy or a flower, is it water or the sea, the trees or the forest, humanity or God? So may He grant that you and I may live the life in which the very question becomes impossible. "I and my Father are one."

That the writer of the Fourth Gospel saw this is perfectly clear from what he has written elsewhere. Does the sentence I am going to quote have a more familiar and present value now we have been meditating together—listen. "Beloved, now are we sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He—or rather, it—shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." May I go on? "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. And there shall be no more sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away."

"When a soul has seen,
By the means of evil that good is best,

And through earth and its noise what is heaven's serene,
When our faith in the same has stood the test,
Why the child grown man you burn the rod
The uses of labour are surely done,
There remaineth a rest for the people of God,
And I have had troubles enough for one."

"Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God, the Lord is one and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind." Here is the rule and the way of life to men who have learned to know that love is the fulfilling of the law, the fundamental secret of the universe. All is love, all is God. "I and My Father are one."

I say, then, this is our hope and this is the meaning of our life, with all its light and shadow, sorrow and joy, good and ill. I am talking to you very quietly to-night, as though there were but one person present, and we are conversing heart to heart upon the deep things of life. We are—permit the paradox—one and all, in living our life, struggling back to a place we have never left in the heart of God. Bad as you are, many of you, foolish as you may be, sin-stained as you know yourselves to be, God has never let you go. It was a sinful man who wrote, "Whither shall I go from Thy spirit, whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there, if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there." "I and My Father are one." To Him, amidst our sins, are His children dear.

Now, brethren, I have unfolded my theme, and I trust you see my meaning. I want to know whether we understand Christ's purpose in uttering this sentence. He did not utter it to glorify Himself. He did not wrangle with the Jews to gain a dialectical victory. He was aiming at something. What was it? Let the context tell. If, said He, you have said of the great ones of the earth, the great and the good, Ye are gods—and it is a phrase that often springs to our lips; we use it even now when we see one whose moral stature is higher than his fellows, a godlike man—if you use that phrase concerning them, may I not humbly claim it for one whom God hath sanctified and sent to bring you into life. Learn it well. The works do testify that "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Every man may enter into this experience of the oneness of God. Even very ordinary human nature has had power with some of you to touch at least a corner of this life. I remember one night in particular when I stood at this desk, as I am standing now, a young fellow sat upon my right in the chair nearest to me, and he afterwards came to tell me this. I give the substance of his words. "I came into the Church that night with a heavy burden on my conscience, and a clammy fear gripping at my heart. I was struggling as it seemed in vain and in awful dread of falling before a certain temptation. I came there hoping that the preacher might turn to me and speak."

It just happened that when the service was over I did turn, a thing I do not do once in a hundred times, and spoke a word to the one who sat nearest to me in our common worship. I little knew what was taking place. Idealising the preacher whom he thought he knew, he felt as if new strength had entered into him. He fought his battle on the morrow. He felt as if it were already won. He felt as if he could take heart of grace and try again. Where do you think the real strength came from? It is often so in ordinary life. That man was lifted nearer God because he was in the house of prayer; and as he fell under the shadow of another's spirit, did deity shine through humanity, very ordinary humanity, or did it not? Let the works be the evidence.

Here is a man who owes everything he has in the world to the example of a good mother or a good father. You would have gone to the devil long ago, young man, but on the threshold of the gambling hell or of the liquor saloon, which does a roaring trade on a Sunday night, you were arrested by an invisible hand. Your mother's arm stretched a long way, but it was strong enough to draw you back from the things of hell. Be thankful now you are stronger, be thankful—and you are thankful—that your manhood is what it is. The life, pure, consecrated life, had power to bring you up to God. Did God shine through such a life or did He not? I have heard men say of father,

mother, friend, "My mother's life, my father's manhood, my friend's goodness persuaded me—even though my evil self would have ruined me—persuaded me God reigneth." Seeking for a symbol for God, you need not go beyond your own home and your mother. Say, "She and my Father are one," in the love that she bears for you and the goodness that saved you. "I and My Father are one."

Even in ordinary humanity, then, such as I have instanced, we have our sacred seasons when we feel that humanity has not lost everything, and all opportunity of showing God. I have looked on the faces of men whose kindred I knew, and yet who had sunken in infamy. I remember a man whose face was a mass of corruption coming to me without disclosing his identity, but I knew him, I knew him for the man I was in search of, and why? It was because I saw his father's face, I recognised his brother's features. He had done his best to drink them into oblivion, but he had not managed it quite. They were not gone. The air of a gentleman was still upon him, and the noble dignity of those who bore his name and were of his lineage was evident in his very demeanour. A poor drunkard, and perhaps worse, but there was shining through him a noble humanity, figure of deity, the "love that will not let me go."

But the other day, in that terrible war that is taking place in the Far East, an august event took

place. Two Japanese officers arrested as spies, condemned to death, asked as a last privilege to be permitted to give what little worldly wealth they possessed for the sake of the widows and children of the Russian dead. The very startling surprise of the deed stirred a chord of sympathy and admiration for our common humanity in those who heard the offer and in us who read it. What was it? Amid the horror of war, the blackness and hideousness of the devilry in that hell upon earth, in that little corner of the Far East, shone out a bright star. Humanity was capable of something divine in a golden moment. I have seen as much myself in the deeds, in the carriage of ordinary men and women, very ill to live with, people for whom in their everyday life one could not entertain or manifest much respect. I have seen the impulsive act of a bad man elevate him. I have seen the light of heaven dawn in beauty upon the face of one whose whole career had been for self-interest and for the things that perished, but that look spoke of heaven, not of earth. And, amongst the very worst with whom you have to deal, you will see from time to time, when the crisis is at hand, the manifestation of that which is worthy of God. What a man is in his best moments, that God has made him capable of being for ever. That he must and shall become, even though it be through pain. "I and My Father are one."

One word of application. I would appeal to some

of the non-Churchgoers who are present. I do not say I am going to make you Churchgoers, but I wish I could make you good men. Here you come, brought perhaps by curiosity, to hear one who has never raised his voice to a shout since you entered the building, who has not uttered a sensational word, who has not spoken a sentence just for the sake of speaking. Hither you come, fresh from the great fight for bread, for a footing in the great world. You are supposed to take a poor view of humanity and its ways. You are pretty hard yourself, coarse, material, worldly. You are what would be called practical men. There is not much sentiment to spare, you have no vision of God and no aspiration for a better and a higher life. Do not be untrue to the very law of your own being. You know quite well in your heart of hearts you would rather be like Jesus than like what you are. If you knew the way out of the life you are living, not that it is so flagrantly bad, as the world judges, but if you knew your way to a better and you could go without struggle and without sacrifice, you would go. What is it that speaks thus? God has never left you, nor the Christ, the Christ that is within. Do you not feel that this is what the universe means? Do you not realise that this is the purpose, the real purpose, of your poor little sinful failure of a life, that you may say, as Jesus said, "I and My Father are one." To be one with right, to be one with heroism, to be one with good-

ness, to be one with the manhood that you can respect and reverence and adore, that should be the aim and object of your life. Do you know the way to it? I think, though you may say I have lapsed back into conventionality and taken too much for granted, I can take you to no better place than the cross of Christ. What did it cost Him to follow the right? What did it mean to live what He felt to be the true life of oneness with God? It meant Calvary. Ah, there is the place to which poor human nature is unwilling to go. It might cost you a Calvary to turn from your corrupt, evil ways to-morrow and go right, and you are not prepared for the price. Then be aware that as you turn your back upon the light, as you repudiate the Christ you are not merely repudiating a creed, you are repudiating the ideal. You have deliberately chosen the lower, not that which is humanity, but that which is bestial. You have turned your back upon heaven, you are choosing hell. Do you think that is the way to peace and rest and joy? It can never be. Face round, cost what it may in soul agony. It is worth all that you can give to be able to say with a clear conscience and a humble heart, "I and My Father are one."

Here is another, a sore, burdened, stricken heart. What are you doing in the City Temple? You have never been so very religious before, and you have not come here because we talk platitudes, no, nor because we take for granted the experience of

other men. It may be an inspiration, but we will not strike the false note of pretending it is ours unless it is. Hither you have come, filled with vengeful, angry, evil thoughts. You have failed in life, not entirely of your own fault. You have suffered injury, you have no vision of God, any more than the worldly man whom I have just described. You are groping along in the dark. Every blow you strike, remember, even in your thought, recoils upon you. You deny your own dignity, you crush down your own divinity. The first thing for you to do, and this night, is to get at one, not with the world, but with God, to get the better, not of the man who struck you down, but of the evil self that resents the injury. Rise up, child of the highest, though Apollyon meet you in the Valley of Humiliation, defy him in the name of the Lord of Hosts. That you have a hard battle to fight I know. It is no new thing in the history of mankind, and I would have you aware that you are not alone in doing it. "All nature," as Henry Drummond says, "is on the side of the man who tries to rise." Take courage for to-morrow. Fear nothing. Calvary is never the last word. Be brave and faithful, for on the dark waters of life there sails another barque than yours. It may be hidden from you by the shadows, but its Captain is the Son of God. Jesus has not forgotten His own humanity, nor has He ceased to care for yours. He can move Heaven for you, and He will.

I am calling for a very simple decision. Say "I will go right, I will be true. If I have never been at ease with my own conscience and with God before, I mean to be now." "I and My Father are one." That vow is registered in heaven, and it is heard by One Who has never failed the seeking soul.

"Strong Son of God, immortal Love,
Whom we, that have not seen Thy face,
By faith, and faith alone embrace,
Believing where we cannot prove;

"Thou seemest human and divine,
The highest, holiest manhood, Thou:
Our wills are ours, we know not how;
Our wills are ours, to make them Thine."

INWARD TRUTH

An interesting story goes along with this sermon. Attendants at the City Temple may remember that on the Thursday following the preaching of this particular sermon, I read and spoke about the poignant letter of one who had felt himself described in the experience here set forth. He was an educated man, and his way of telling his story showed that he possessed great natural ability. He declared his intention of ending his own life, which had become intolerable through his depressing failures. He had somehow slipped down gradually from a position of trust and importance; had ceased to be respected by his friends; was looked upon as a burden; was shunned by his own family; even his children had learned to look upon him with the world's eyes. The keenest thrust of all was that he now saw, or fancied he saw, a change in his wife's attitude towards him. This was not wonderful, he declared, for though she had been a brave, faithful, uncomplaining friend, she could hardly fail to see him at length as her children saw him. He made no appeal for help, and did not even furnish his address. The letter, as a whole, is worth quoting, but the closing sentence is sufficient to show its purport:—"If my epitaph were to be written it would be: Here lies one who trifled with life, who had abundant opportunities for usefulness and honour, who might have been a power for God, a blessing to humanity and others, a witness for righteousness, but who was none of these because he lacked—Inward Truth."

This letter became my subject and my sermon on the following Thursday; and the writer, broken down by the unexpected declaration of God's mercy and love, came to me afterwards, as I had asked him to do. Half a dozen hands were held out by the city men present to give him a fresh start. No one had been asked to help, but the help was freely given by good men. My colleague, Mr Badger, acted as intermediary, as he has done in many similar cases, with the result that to-day this gentleman is not only doing well in the world, but is helping others to understand the meaning of Inward Truth. He was well worth the miracle wrought by our Heavenly Father on his behalf.

XVIII

"Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts."—Psalm li. 6.

The 51st Psalm is a hymn of penitence, and is said to have been written by King David after the greatest folly and the darkest sin of his life. It is possible that he was not the author, but, whether he was or not, this utterance of sorrowing self-accusation has become intimately associated with all such spiritual moods as his, and has woven itself into our hearts and experience. It is a prayer of singular beauty as well as moral depth and religious significance. The Psalmist ignores the question of penalty for his misdoings, and they were black enough: it is God he wants and the purity he has lost. "The sacrifices of God," he says, "are a broken spirit. A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise."

This utterance explains the meaning of the phrase which is our text. No external act counts for anything; God measures by the inner rightness—a heart right with God and goodness, purity and righteousness. The prayer of the Psalmist is, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

In these days the sense of sin is somewhat lightly

held by many people, while in others it seems to be entirely absent. Nevertheless, there is in every man a something which in its protest for truth comes very near to the lost sense of sin. I am going to try to show you what this something is.

The word "truth" in our text refers to moral truth. Truth is one and indivisible, but it has many aspects. For example, suppose I could hand a rose to three such men as Professor Huxley, John Ruskin, and C. H. Spurgeon, and ask them to say what they knew about it or thought concerning it. Professor Huxley—I purposely choose him, because he was a man of sterling worth and high moral character as well as a great scientist and accomplished botanist—would instantly think of the structure of the rose, and tell us about its anatomy; in fact, his knowledge of natural law was so profound that from his acquaintance with the rose the professor could infer the universe if he had not seen it. Mr Ruskin would speak quite differently. We know, from the eloquence of his writings, the charm and the magic of his work, that his first thought would be concerning the beauty of the flower; a universe of beauty would be suggested to him by the simple rose. Remember, the rose is but a symbol; it stands for the glorious, infinite unity, and to John Ruskin that unity would breathe beauty. What of Mr Spurgeon? It has been said of him that, in his maturest days, when he knew most about men and things, when he had drunk deepest of the cup of life, when his

experience was at its very richest, he was as simple as a child in his handling of the things of God. They say that when he took a flower in his hand he would speak about it as though he had seen it made, had watched the fingers of God at work upon it. To him the flower would suggest a universe, too, just as to Huxley and to Ruskin, but it would be a universe of righteousness, a universe that told of the love of God. These three men would not be singing three different songs, telling three different truths; they would be speaking one truth, but from three different points of view. To Huxley the rose would suggest the physical universe, to Ruskin the universe of beauty, and to Spurgeon the universe of moral truth; but these three are one, and ultimately the meaning of the whole is, God is love as well as power, God is goodness as well as beauty. As Tennyson has it:—

> "Knowledge is the swallow on the lake
> That sees and stirs the surface shadow there,
> But never yet hath dipt into the abysm";

or, as Keats puts it:—

> "'Beauty is truth, truth beauty'—that is all
> Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

The physical, the intellectual, the moral universe are but one.

When a man says, "I follow truth wheresoever I find it, and for that reason I am unable to accept your affirmations about God," I should like to test

him by the standard of Mr Spurgeon rather than that of Professor Huxley—sterling man though he undoubtedly was—and ask him, What kind of man are you? for the universe will reflect to you exactly what you bring to it. What kind of life are you living? Are you a good man? Are you living a right life? Are you even trying to do so? Are you looking upward every day? Is duty nobly and faithfully done your watchword? Then, though you may not be able to affirm much concerning the structure or the meaning of God's great mysterious universe, you are at home in it, you have truth in the inward parts, and there God speaks to you. By saying I want to know what kind of man he is, I am inferring that he does not know his own world unless he himself is true at heart.

We in this country profess a great love of truth in the shape of integrity, verbal trustworthiness, and so on; our standard is not very exacting, but we could not get on at all without it. To business men such a proposition as that is self-evident. When I was in America last year I was somewhat amused by criticisms I heard of our business methods. More than once I met with the statement, "We are sorry to say that very often we cannot trust to British ways of doing business and what your business men say about their stock-in-trade." My reply was, "Oddly enough, that is exactly what I heard on the other side of the water about you!" It is a matter of grave concern to both Britons and

Americans who love their country that in commerce there is not more of the virtue to which we profess to attach so much importance. There is much trickiness and sharp practice in the places where you get your daily bread; you have seen many mean and dirty actions in business life; in fact, to the honest man life seems a continual fight against dishonesty. One has to confess that the standard of the world—though, thank God, it is better than it once was—is still very low. You cannot measure a man's motives by what he says; he may take the name of God upon his lips though in his heart he is not true. The issue lies deeper than a mere question, for instance, of discount on a bill. We say, after long acquaintance with an individual—and as a rule only long acquaintance justifies such statements—"So-and-so is a true man; I have proved him." Why do you use the word "true"? Because you know something about that man, though it might not be considered proof in a court of law. If you were asked to write a testimonial to his integrity, you would say some things at which a judge or prosecuting lawyer might laugh. But you have been down to the depths of your friend's being, and you know he rings true, because more than once he has been willing to suffer for truth, the world not knowing. It has been said of John Bright that his sincerity was proved by every possible test, and I think that was true. There are men in a humbler posi-

tion than that John Bright of whom it could be said that they are true to the depths; no mean or shabby action could proceed from such men, and we are grateful for their life and influence. Amongst my circle of friends I have more than one whom I feel to be true to the very core of his being—loyal, strong, noble, and good. Such men are worth more to their country than untold gold, for they help to make men; to be under the shadow of their influence stimulates one to the living of a nobler life.

On the other hand, we know men who we feel are false, though we cannot always say why; and here again our evidence in a court of law would be nonsuited. There are men whom you would not trust any further than you can see them; you know somehow, by instinct of honest judgment, that these men would fail you in a crisis; they could be depended on just as far as it suited their interest, and no further. Sometimes, by an accident, the essential falsity of a man's nature is revealed. A friend told me that he once received from a man, with whom he was dealing in business, a letter to this effect: "I find I overcharged you threepence on the invoice sent you yesterday. Please correct and return." Said my friend: "I determined to watch that man; I wanted to see whether he was as particular about truth in the heart as he seemed to be about truth in the letter." Sure enough, later on, the man found himself in

a corner with his back to the wall, and it was not a question of pence but of pounds. That man in reality was a thief all the time. When I was in Scotland recently I went to a very interesting place, the Observatory at Paisley. I there saw an instrument for measuring earthquakes, a seismological register. A block of stone, twenty-four solid feet in depth, was thrust into the earth ; down and down it went, standing like an isolated column in the vacuum carefully preserved on every side of it. On the top a delicate instrument was poised, which actually wrote with a pencil a record of the vibrations and oscillations that were taking place in every part of the globe. Said the gentleman in charge, "If an earthquake were taking place in Japan its motion would be written here as faithfully as though we were on the spot to measure it." "Then what about the rumbles here in Paisley?" said I. "You make noise enough in your streets: would they be registered by your instrument?" "No," was the reply. "We do not trouble about vibrations on the surface. We measure from the depths." That is the way to measure—truth in the inward parts.

> "Truth is within ourselves ;
> It takes no rise from outward things,
> Whate'er you may believe."

We do not measure by a man's profession, but by what comes from the depths of his nature. A man who is as faithful in the shadow as in the light, as

faithful when it does not pay to be faithful at the time as when it does—that is the man to whom to commit your trust; he was right with God ere he was right with you; and if it came to be a question whether he should sacrifice you or truth—truth as Spurgeon understood it—it would be God he would choose, not you.

> "I could not love thee, dear, so much
> Loved I not honour more."

There is something more than trivial sentimentality in that utterance.

Before I come to closer dealings, I would just indicate wherein really consists the greatest value in all estimates of moral character. It is not merely a question of dealing between man and man. If we had nothing to preach about except iniquity, our pulpit message would be a poor one; I mean un-equity, by which a man does not deal straight with his fellows. That is not all, it is not the end, it is not really the beginning. It is sin with which we have to do—that is, a man's transgression against God, the thing that hides God from him. When you are dealing with iniquity you are really dealing at the same time with another factor deeper than any of the relations which a man holds with his fellows, and that is his relationship with God. Perhaps I address some men who have no very tight grip upon the truth that they have a relationship with God; they would profess themselves uncertain,

agnostics, whatnot. "There may be a God, there may not; but," you say, "I am trying to live a straight life." I wonder if you see how far your creed goes. A straight life—why, that means that you might some day have to endure the whole world of humanity shrieking shame upon you, isolating you, withering you with censure and with sarcasm, with opposition and abuse. Supposing you stood alone against the world, would you still try to live a "straight life?" In your heart of hearts you feel you would. Do you know what you have affirmed now? You have affirmed that truth lies deeper than human interest or human opinion; that truth is eternal, and it comes from the depths. In other words, truth is God, righteousness; this righteousness that you serve is the very nature of the All-Father. If a man is true to that in the heart of him, he can defy the whole organised universe; for behind all, after all, God.

It is from this deeper truth that the grandest achievements of history have always sprung. For that truth Mr Spurgeon would have gone to the stake cheerfully. Why? Because he felt, as we feel, that in the long run and the last resort all humanity must be sacrificed if need be—I mean all friendship, all relation with it—rather than be false to what we feel is beneath humanity, greater than humanity, worthier than humanity—the truth of God. "My soul, be thou silent unto God." "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew

a right spirit within me." "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight."

The Psalmist gauged accurately and described our own experience when he uttered those words. It is with God, when we come to real dealings with truth, that you and I hold relation. Perhaps I address a man who is right with the rest of humanity, but wrong with this mysterious entity of which I have spoken. To illustrate. Suppose Adolf Beck, of whom we have been hearing so much, were really guilty; suppose—as I doubt not some infatuated officials will insist—the crimes for which he was punished had been really committed by him; how would he feel to-day with the whole country ringing with indignation on his behalf? Would you change places with him? If, as you walked the streets, conscious of your guilt, honest men grasped your hands and uttered words of pity and admiration, I think that before the week was out you would want to put an end to your life. Suppose I address a man whose experience has been anything like that: you managed to vindicate yourself once when you knew that in the depths of you you were not true; it was the eternal right you had offended; with the eternal God you had yet something to do. Can you remember your waking thought in the morning after you had dreamed that your guilty act had never been committed, the awful voice that sounded in your heart, the voice that David heard, "Thou art

the man!" You may deceive the whole world, but you cannot deceive that deeper self which is one with God. "Against Thee have I sinned. . . . Thou desirest truth in the inward parts."

One word more of application. If I address a man of double life, a man with something evil huddled out of sight, I would like to speak to him, not a word of threatening denunciation, but of pity and pleading. That thing you are seeking to bury, that putrifying corpse, will come to light some day, like Eugene Aram's victim. It is showing itself now in all its hideousness to Him whom no evil can deceive. If your life is a lie, it would pay you better—I announce no penalty—to get right with the truth, however much it may scorch you, than to persist in the lie that seems to screen you. There is a true reserve. Very few men will confess anything but surface stories about their lives; as a rule they do not tell all the truth. Why should they? It all depends just what it is a man is keeping from the gaze of his fellows. If that which you are huddling away is something by which you are injuring another or the community, out with it. Pretence is not the just reserve that belongs to such men as John Knox and John Bright, men who are right with God and can afford to be silent with their fellows; what you are keeping away is just that which God is showing forth in the terrible light of the world of spirit; it is all already known.

What about the man who is deceiving the people

to whom he owes most in the world? Husband, what about that faithful little woman at home whom you are deceiving every day of your life? Young man, new to the great city, but old in its evils, what about those people in the village from which you came, who are telling tales of pride about you—that are all false, only they do not know it? What about those who are praising you for virtues you do not possess and for courses of action you have never taken? What of those who denounce in your presence vices of others that are not so dark as yours? What of those who hold you up as pattern and example, when you are the very opposite? Oh, hideous travesty of life! Can any man endure to live it? Truly the way of transgressors is hard, because it is a false thing. The truth and the truth only will make a man at peace with himself. If there is any vestige or shadow of truth left in you, any real manhood, you will be ashamed of being credited with merits that are not yours. But if you have ceased to feel, then you are sleeping the sleep of death. The very agony and shame which you feel when the truth is revealed is evidence that truth within you is not dead. What about that young fellow becoming entangled—it may be for the first time, and conscience gnawing at him all the while—in devious ways, keeping company he dare not confess, conforming to practices that he knows to be shameful and bad? You are a miserable wretch—you do not need anybody to tell you that. But in

time you will become callous and hardened; the voice that now speaks within you will be stilled; you have Truth down, as it were, helpless and at your mercy: you are throttling her, and by the time you have slain that heavenly guest you will find that you yourself were the victim, the helpless victim, of a ghastly sham that stands for you—that of wrong, of shame, of evil. You are a slow murderer. "He that sinneth against Me wrongeth his own soul." The conscience of David slumbered for a while; so may yours, but only for a while. There was another voice that spoke through Nathan the prophet, the voice of the eternal right, that never can be stilled. You may stifle the voice of conscience, but the voice of God will speak again in time or in eternity. "Thou art the man!"

Make terms with righteousness even now; get right with God at this moment, cost what it may. Turn round upon evil living if you have become its victim. I care not what the price may be, it is worth while. There is a way out of every moral entanglement and of every moral abyss. I have hardly named the name of Christ in this sermon; but any man who sees the form of Christ before his eyes, when he thinks about the facts which I have just set before you, sees the answer to his prayer. "Whither shall I go from Thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there." Whither shall I go? Here is the way

and the truth and the life. If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have no sin, we make Him a liar, and the truth is not in us.

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